

of dust and shadows by Xlpver

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Summary:

SEQUEL TO "Of Men and Angels"

Eddie Kaspbrak just wishes that his life would go back to normal. But what's normal when you're a demon-slaying Shadowhunter, your mother is in a magically induced coma, and you can suddenly see Downworlders like werewolves, vampires and faeries? If Eddie left the world of the Shadowhunters behind, it would mean more time

with his best friend, Stan, whose sudden changes are starting to worry him, or his other best friend Beverly, who is a witch. But the Shadowhunting world isn't ready to let him go. And Eddie's only chance to help his mother is to track down rogue Shadowhunter Pennywise, who is probably insane, certainly evil—and also his father.

To complicate matters, someone in New York City is murdering Downworlder children. Is Pennywise behind the killings—and if he is, what is he trying to do? When the second of the Mortal Instruments, the Soul-Sword, is stolen, the terrifying Inquisitor arrives to investigate and zooms right in on Ben. How can Eddie stop Pennywise if Ben is willing to betray everything he believes in to help their father?

Now Eddie and his friends must go into a new adventure to save humanity, and themselves, before it's too late.

1. Brave New World

Notes for the Chapter:

Guess who's back!?? 7u7 me.

I'm so ready for this, I hope you are as well. :3

"Are you still mad?"

Bill, leaning against the wall of the elevator, glared across the small space at Ben. "I'm not m-mad."

"Oh, yes you are." Ben gestured accusingly at his stepbrother, then yelped as pain shot up his arm. Every part of him hurt from the thumping he'd taken that afternoon when he'd dropped three floors through rotted wood onto a pile of scrap metal. Even his fingers were bruised. Bill, who'd only recently put away the crutches he'd had to use after his fight with Abbadon, didn't look much better than Ben felt. His clothes were covered in mud and his hair hung down in lank, sweaty strips. There was a long cut down the side of his cheek.

"I am not," Bill said, through his teeth. "Just because you s-said dragon demons were e-extinct—"

"I said mostly extinct."

Bill jabbed a finger toward him. "M-mostly extinct," he said, his voice trembling with rage, "is NOT EXTINCT ENOUGH."

"Boys, boys," said Richie, who'd been examining his hair in the elevator's mirrored wall. "Don't fight." He turned away from the glass with a sunny smile. "All right, so it was a little more action than we were expecting, but I thought it was fun."

Ben looked at him and shook his head. "How do you manage *never* to get mud on you?"

Richie shrugged philosophically. "I'm pure at heart. It repels the dirt."

Bill snorted so loudly that Richie turned on him with a frown. "Filthy

i-inside and out.”

Richie was about to reply when the elevator ground to a halt with the sound of screeching brakes. “Time to get this thing fixed,” he said, yanking the door open. Ben followed him out into the entryway, already looking forward to shucking his armor and weapons and stepping into a hot shower. He’d convinced his stepsiblings to come hunting with him despite the fact that neither of them was entirely comfortable going out on their own now that Keene wasn’t there to give them instructions. But Ben had wanted the oblivion of fighting and the distraction of injuries. And knowing he wanted it, they’d gone along with it, crawling through filthy deserted subway tunnels until they’d found the Dragonidae demon and killed it. The three of them working together in perfect unison, the way they always had. Like family.

He unzipped his jacket and slung it over one of the pegs hanging on the wall. Bill was sitting on the low wooden bench next to him, kicking off his muck-covered boots. He was humming tunelessly under his breath, letting Richie know he wasn’t that annoyed. “Now I’m hungry,” Ben said. “I wish Mom were here to cook us something.”

“Better that she isn’t,” said Richie, unbuckling his weapons belt. “She’d already be shrieking about the rugs.”

“You’re right about that,” said a cool voice, and Richie swung around, his hands still at his belt, and they saw Sharon Denbrough, her arms folded, standing in the doorway. She wore a stiff black traveling suit and her hair was drawn back into a thick rope that hung halfway down her back. Her eyes, a glacial blue, swept over the three of them like a tracking searchlight.

“Mom!” Bill, even though he was limping, went to his mother for a hug. Richie got to his feet and joined them.

Ben stood where he was. There had been something in Sharon’s eyes as her gaze had passed over him that froze him in place.

“Where’s Zack?” Richie asked, stepping back from his mother. “And Georgie?”

There was an almost imperceptible pause. Then Sharon said, "George is in his room. And your father, unfortunately, is still in Alicante. There was some business there that required his attention."

Bill, generally more sensitive to moods, seemed to hesitate. "Is something wrong?"

"I could ask you that." His mother's tone was dry. "Are you limping?"

"I..."

Bill was a terrible liar. Richie picked up for him, smoothly: "We had a run-in with a Dragonidae demon in the subway tunnels. But it was nothing."

"And I suppose that Greater Demon you fought last week, that was nothing too?"

Even Richie was silenced by that. He looked to Ben, who wished he hadn't.

"That wasn't planned for." Ben was having a hard time concentrating. Sharon hadn't greeted him yet, hadn't said so much as hello, and she was still looking at him with eyes like blue daggers. There was a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach that was beginning to spread. She'd never looked at him like this before, no matter what he'd done. "It was a mistake."

"Ben!" Georgie, the youngest Denbrough, squeezed his way around Sharon and darted into the room, evading his mother's reaching hand. "You're back! You're all back." He turned in a circle, grinning at Bill and Richie in triumph. "I thought I heard the elevator."

"And I thought I told you to stay in your room," said Sharon.

"I don't remember that," said Georgie, with a seriousness that made even Bill smile. Georgie was small for his age—he looked about seven—but he had a self-contained gravity that, combined with his oversize glasses, gave him the air of someone older. "I heard you fought a Greater Demon," he said. "Was it awesome?"

"It was ... different," Richie hedged. "How was Alicante?"

"It was *awesome*. We saw the coolest stuff. There's this huge armory in Alicante and they took me to some of the places where they make the weapons. They showed me a new way to make seraph blades too, so they last longer, and I'm going to try to get Keene to show me—"

Ben couldn't help it; his eyes flicked instantly to Sharon, his expression incredulous. So Georgie didn't know about Keene? Hadn't she told him?

Sharon saw his look and her lips thinned into a knifelike line. "That's enough, George." She took her youngest son by the arm.

He craned his head to look up at her in surprise. "But I'm talking to —"

"I can see that." She pushed him gently toward Bill. "Bill, Richie, take your brother to his room. Ben,"—there was a tightness in her voice when she spoke his name, as if invisible acid were drying up the syllables in her mouth—"get yourself cleaned up and meet me in the library as soon as you can."

"I don't get it," said Richie, looking from his mother to Ben, and back again. "What's going on?"

Ben could feel cold sweat start up along his spine. "Is this about my father?"

Sharon jerked twice, as if the words "my father" had been two separate slaps. "*The library*," she said, through clenched teeth. "We'll discuss the matter there."

Richie said, "What happened while you were gone wasn't Ben's fault. It was mostly my fault. And Keene said—"

"We'll discuss Keene later as well." Sharon's eyes were on Georgie, her tone warning.

"But, Mother," Bill protested. "If you're going to p-punish Ben, you should punish us as well. It w-would only be fair. We all did exactly the s-same things."

"No," said Sharon, after a pause so long that Ben thought perhaps she

wasn't going to say anything at all. "You didn't."

"Rule number one of anime," Stan said. He sat propped up against a pile of pillows at the foot of his bed, a bag of potato chips in one hand and the TV remote in the other. He was wearing a black T-shirt that said I BLOGGED YOUR MOM and a pair of jeans with a hole ripped in one knee. "Never screw with a blind monk."

"I know," Eddie said, taking a potato chip and dunking it into the can of dip balanced on the TV tray between them. "For some reason they're always way better fighters than monks who can see." He peered at the screen. "Are those guys *dancing*?"

"That's not dancing. They're trying to kill each other. This is the guy who's the mortal enemy of the other guy, remember? He killed his dad. Why would they be dancing?"

Eddie crunched at his chip and stared meditatively at the screen, where animated swirls of pink-and-yellow clouds rippled between the figures of two winged men, who floated around each other, each clutching a glowing spear. Every once in a while one of them would speak, but since it was all in Japanese with Chinese subtitles, it didn't clarify much. "The guy with the hat," Eddie said. "He was the evil guy?"

"No, the hat guy was the dad. He was the magical emperor, and that was his hat of power. The evil guy was the one with the mechanical hand that talks."

The telephone rang. Stan set the bag of chips down and made as if to get up and answer it. Eddie grabbed his wrist. "Don't. Just leave it."

"But it might be Jim. He could be calling from the hospital."

"It's not Jim," Eddie said, sounding more sure than he felt. "He'd call my cell, not your house."

Stan looked at him a long moment before sinking back down on the rug beside him. "If you say so." Eddie could hear the doubt in his voice, but also the unspoken assurance, *I just want you to be happy*.

Eddie wasn't sure "happy" was anything he was likely to be right now, not with his mother in the hospital hooked up to tubes and bleeping machines, and Jim like a zombie, slumped in the hard plastic chair next to her bed. Not with worrying about Ben all the time and picking up the phone a dozen times to call the Institute before setting it back down, the number still undialed.

Maybe it had been a mistake to take him to see Sonia. After his *moment* with Richie, he decided that Ben should see his mother. He'd been so sure that if his mother could just hear the voice of her son, her firstborn, she'd wake up. But she hadn't. Ben had stood stiff and awkward by the bed, his face like a painted angel's, with blank indifferent eyes. Eddie had finally lost his patience and shouted at him, and he'd shouted back before storming off. Jim had watched him go with a clinical sort of interest on his exhausted face. "That's the first time I've seen you act like brothers," he'd remarked.

It had been exactly three days since he kissed Richie, and Eddie couldn't still believe it.

He tried to tell Beverly first, but when he called her it went to voicemail, she was probably on Eleven's loft. But when he tried to tell Stan, he stopped to think for a minute. How would Stan react? The last time he saw them kissing, he stormed out of the Institute. Eddie still didn't know if Stan hated Richie or not, he thought, at least here in Stan's house, in his bedroom, Eddie felt comfortable and at home. He'd known Stan long enough to remember when he had a bed shaped like a fire truck and LEGOs piled in a corner of the room. Now the bed was a futon with a brightly striped quilt that had been a present from his sister, and the walls were plastered with posters of bands like Rock Solid Panda and Stepping Razor. There was a drum set wedged into the corner of the room where the LEGOs had been, and a computer in the other corner, the screen still frozen on an image from World of Warcraft. It was almost as familiar as being in his own bedroom at home—which no longer existed, so at least this was the next best thing.

"More chibis," said Stan gloomily. All the characters on-screen had turned into inch-high baby versions of themselves and were chasing each other around waving pots and pans. "I'm changing the channel," Stan announced, seizing the remote. "I'm tired of this anime. I can't

tell what the plot is and no one ever has sex.”

“Of course they don’t,” Eddie said, taking another chip. “Anime is wholesome family entertainment.”

“If you’re in the mood for less wholesome entertainment, we could try the teen channels,” Stan observed. “Would you rather watch *New Girl* or *Riverdale*?”

“Give me that!” Eddie grabbed for the remote, but Stan, chortling, had already switched the TV to another channel.

His laughter broke off abruptly. Eddie looked up in surprise and saw him staring blankly at the TV. An old black-and-white movie was playing—*Dracula*. Eddie had seen it before, with his mother. Bela Lugosi, thin and white-faced, was on-screen, wrapped in the familiar high-collared cloak, his lips curled back from his pointed teeth. “I never drink ... wine,” he intoned in his thick Hungarian accent.

“I love how the spiderwebs are made out of rubber,” Eddie said, trying to sound light. “You can totally tell.”

But Stan was already on his feet, dropping the remote onto the bed. “I’ll be right back,” he muttered. His face was the color of winter sky just before it rained. Eddie watched him go, biting his lip hard. What the hell just happened?

Ben reached the library and knocked once before pushing the door open. Sharon was there, sitting in Keene’s old chair by the fire. Light streamed down through the high windows and Ben could see the touches of gray in her hair. She was holding a glass of red wine; there was a cut-glass decanter on the table beside her.

“Sharon,” he said.

She jumped a little, spilling some of the wine. “Ben. I didn’t hear you come in.”

He didn’t move. “Do you remember that song you used to sing to Bill — when he was little and afraid of the dark—to get him to fall

asleep?"

Sharon appeared taken aback. "What are you talking about?"

"I used to hear you through the walls," he said. "Bill's bedroom was next to mine then."

She said nothing.

"It was in French," Ben said. "The song."

"I don't know why you'd remember something like that." She looked at him as if he'd accused her of something.

"You never sang to me."

There was a barely perceptible pause. Then, "Oh, you," she said. "You were never afraid of the dark."

"What kind of ten-year-old is never afraid of the dark?"

Her eyebrows went up. "Sit down, Jonathan," she said. "Now."

He went, just slowly enough to annoy her, across the room, and threw himself into one of the wing-back chairs beside the desk. "I'd rather you didn't call me Jonathan."

"Why not? It's your name." She looked at him consideringly. "How long have you known?"

"Known what?"

"Don't be stupid. You know exactly what I'm asking you." She turned her glass in her fingers. "How long have you known that Robert Gray is your father?"

Ben considered and discarded several responses. Usually he could get his way with Sharon by making her laugh. "About as long as you have."

Sharon shook her head slowly. "I don't believe that."

Ben sat up straight. His hands were in fists where they rested on the

chair arms. He could see a slight tremor in his fingers, wondered if he'd ever had it before. He didn't think so. His hands had always been as steady as his heartbeat. "You don't *believe* me?"

He heard the incredulity in his own voice and winced inwardly. Of course she didn't believe him. That had been obvious from the moment she had arrived home.

"It doesn't make sense, Ben. How could you not know who your own father is?"

"He told me he was Daniel Hanscom. We lived in the Hanscom country house—"

"A nice touch," said Sharon, "that. And your name? What's your real name?"

"You know my real name."

"Jonathan. I knew that was Robert's son's name. I knew Daniel had a son named Jonathan too. It's a common enough Shadowhunter name—I never thought it was strange they shared it, and as for Daniel's boy's middle name, I never inquired. But now I can't help wondering. What was Daniel Hanscom's son's real middle name? How long had Robert been planning what he was going to do? How long did he know he was going to murder Jonathan Hanscom—?" She broke off, her eyes fixed on Ben. "You never looked like Daniel. you know," she said. "But sometimes children don't look like their parents. I didn't think about it before. But now I can see Pennywise in you. The way you're looking at me. That defiance. You don't care what I say, do you?"

But he cared, and that was what hurt the most. "I'm still exactly the same person I've been for the past seven years. Nothing's changed about me. If I didn't remind you of Pennywise before, I don't see why I would now."

Her glance moved over him and away as if she couldn't bear to look directly at him. "Surely when we talked about Daniel, you must have known we couldn't possibly have meant your father. The things we said about him could never have applied to Bob."

"You said he was a good man." Anger twisted inside him. "A brave Shadowhunter. A loving father. I thought that seemed accurate enough."

"What about photographs? You must have seen photographs of Daniel Hanscom and realized he wasn't the man you called your father." She bit her lip. "Help me out here, Ben."

"All the photographs were destroyed in the Uprising. That's what you told me. Now I wonder if it wasn't because Pennywise had them all burned so nobody would know who was in the Circle. I never had a photograph of my father," Ben said, and wondered if he sounded as bitter as he felt.

Sharon put a hand to her temple and massaged it as if her head were aching. "I can't believe this," she said, as if to herself. "It's insane."

"So don't believe it. Believe *me*," Ben said, and felt the tremor in his hands increase.

She dropped her hand. "Don't you think I want to?" she demanded, and for a moment he heard the echo in her voice of the Sharon who'd come into his bedroom at night when he was ten years old and staring dry-eyed at the ceiling, thinking of his father—and she'd sat by the bed with him until he'd fallen asleep just before dawn.

"I didn't know," Ben said again. "And when he asked me to come with him back to Derry, I said no. I'm still here. Doesn't that count for anything?"

She turned to look back at the decanter, as if considering another drink, then seemed to discard the idea. "I wish it did," she said. "But there are so many reasons your father might want you to remain at the Institute. Where Pennywise is concerned, I can't afford to trust anyone his influence has touched."

"His influence touched you," Ben said, and instantly regretted it at the look that flashed across her face.

"And I repudiated him," said Sharon. "Have you? Could you?" Her blue eyes were the same color as Bill's, but Bill had never looked at

him like this. "Tell me you hate him, Ben. Tell me you hate that man and everything he stands for."

A moment passed, and another, and Ben, looking down, saw that his hands were so tightly fisted that the knuckles stood out white and hard like the bones in a fish's spine. "I can't say that."

Sharon sucked in her breath. "Why not?"

"Why can't you say that you trust me? I've lived with you almost half my life. Surely you must know me better than that?"

"You sound so honest. You always have, even when you were a little boy trying to pin the blame for something you'd done wrong on Richie or Bill. I've only ever met one person who could sound as persuasive as you."

Ben tasted copper in his mouth. "You mean my father."

"There were only ever two kinds of people in the world for Pennywise," she said. "Those who were for the Circle and those who were against it. The latter were enemies, and the former were weapons in his arsenal. I saw him try to turn each of his friends, even his own wife, into a weapon for the Cause—and you want me to believe he wouldn't have done the same with his own son?" She shook her head. "I knew him better than that." For the first time, Sharon looked at him with more sadness than anger. "You are an arrow shot directly into the heart of the Clave, Ben. You are Pennywise's arrow. Whether you know it or not."

"I still don't understand why me dressed as freaking Mary Poppins is going to help me control my magic." Beverly yanked off her oversized red hat and sighed angrily.

"It won't," Eleven said, examining her own hands inside her white latex gloves. "But you have to admit, the sixties were literally the best ever."

"I wouldn't know, because I wasn't in the *freaking* sixties."

"First rule of witchcraft," Eleven raised a finger. "Do not bring any dark vibes to a sacred place."

"I wouldn't consider this a sacred place," Beverly took off her exaggerating uncomfortable gloves and finally felt the cold air hitting her hand. "I think I saw four pairs of lingerie under your bed."

The room was exactly the same as before, just full of color. If Beverly could describe this room, her first thought would be rainbow.

She had been with Eleven for the past three hours, and she couldn't get more bored, Eleven had taught her the history of witchcraft, telling her a bunch of names of people Beverly wasn't interested in. It felt like a boring History class in school all over again.

"Okay, that's it," Beverly said. "Can you give me back my old clothes? This stupid coat is making sweat in places I rather not mention."

Eleven seemed distracted for a minute but then she wiggled her hand and Beverly was back to her white blouse, her jeans and her comfortable Convers. "Thank you."

"Well, now let's get started." Eleven clapped her hands and took out a little cat statue from the bed, she put it on a round pink table. "Telekinesis is the easiest thing a witch can do, we all have it, so it should be easy for you."

"Okay," Beverly nodded. "How...do I do it?"

"Just concentrate on the cat," Eleven pointed to the gold statue. "Focus on moving it, wherever you want to. Tell your brain that that's what you want."

Beverly inhaled deeply and raised her hand, pointing to the cat, it was easier said than done, nothing was happening.

"Nothing." Beverly said, disillusioned.

"Patience is a virtue, Beverly. How do you think I created the law of universal gravitation?"

"That was Newton."

"Believe what makes you sleep at night, dear." Eleven winked and

stared at the table. "Do it again, focus all your emotions into the cat, forget everything and just let the magic come out."

Beverly sighed and closed her eyes, the only times she could do magic was because she was scared. But now she wasn't scared, maybe she could try another emotion, maybe happiness. She tried to remember every fun moment with Eddie and Stan, when they were in her house to play Just Dance all night, or how they could sneak inside school at midnight to vandalize the classrooms and make everyone believe there was a ghost, or how they used to record little horror movies that consisted on Stan making a fool of himself. Or, when he was with Eddie right here, finding out she was a witch, finding out she was special. That she had the potential to be something else, a better version of herself.

"Kid, stop!" Beverly didn't realize Eleven was shooting until she felt a hand across her cheek.

"Ow!" Beverly screamed in pain, when she opened her eyes. She saw that the little cat statue was still in the same spot, but... The curtains were on the floor, all the paintings were destroyed, drops of paint all over the floor. The bed covers were glued to the ceiling. "What—What the hell happened?"

"You exceeded, that happened." Eleven sighed angrily. She swiped her hand and everything went back to normal. "Raincheck, tomorrow, nine o'clock."

"I'm really sorry," Beverly apologized quickly. "I don't know what happened."

"It's fine, kid." Eleven moved her hand, the door opened. "Just don't do it our next session."

Beverly grabbed her bag, which was stained with paint and got out of the loft, she could sense it was eight pm at least. She tried calling Eddie or Stan, but it was their boys night, and she didn't want to be the third wheel.

She kept walking, hearing the sound of her footsteps against the sidewalk, she saw a few cats running around, from ceiling to ceiling.

A man with cat eyes kept staring at her, so Beverly walked faster.

After a few minutes of walking, she found herself in front of a bar called "The Hunter's Moon." It wasn't so big, she could smell beer and wine, hearing people talking.

Maybe what she needed right now was a drink.

Eddie shut the bedroom door on the blaring TV and went to look for Stan. He found him in the kitchen, bent over the sink with the water running. His hands were braced on the draining board.

"Stan?" The kitchen was a bright, cheerful yellow, the walls decorated with framed chalk and pencil sketches Stan and Leah had done in grade school. Leah had some drawing talent, you could tell, but Stan's sketches of people all looked like parking meters with tufts of hair.

He didn't look up now, though Eddie could tell by the tightening of his shoulder muscles that he'd heard. Eddie went over to the sink, laying a hand lightly on his back. He felt the sharp nubs of his spine through the thin cotton T-shirt and wondered if Stan had lost weight. He couldn't tell by looking at him, but looking at Stan was like looking in a mirror—when you saw someone every day, you didn't always notice small changes in their outward appearance. "Are you okay?"

Stan turned the water off with a hard jerk of his wrist. "Sure. I'm fine."

"You don't look fine. Was it the movie?"

He didn't answer.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have laughed, it's just—"

"You don't remember?" His voice sounded hoarse.

"I..." Eddie trailed off. That night, looking back, seemed a long haze of running, of blood and sweat, of shadows glimpsed in doorways, of

falling through space. He remembered the white faces of the vampires, like paper cutouts against the darkness, and remembered Richie holding him, shouting hoarsely into his ear. "Not really. It's a blur."

Stan's glaze flicked past him and then back. "Do I seem different to you?" he asked.

Eddie raised his eyes. Stan's were the color of black coffee—not really black, but a rich brown without a touch of gray or hazel. Did he seem different? There might have been an extra touch of confidence in the way he held himself since the day he'd killed Abbadon, the Greater Demon; but there was also a wariness about him, as if he were waiting or watching for something. It was something Eddie had noticed about Richie as well. Perhaps it was only the awareness of mortality. "You're still Stan."

Stan half-closed his eyes as if in relief, and as his eyelashes lowered, Eddie saw how angular his cheekbones looked. He *had* lost weight, Eddie thought, and was about to say so when the harsh ring of the telephone cut through his thoughts.

Stan turned away first, reaching for the phone that hung on the wall beside the spice rack. "Hello?" He sounded normal, but his chest was rising and falling fast. He held the receiver out to Eddie. "It's for you. It's Richie."

Eddie took the phone. He could feel the pounding of his heart in his throat, like the fluttering wings of an insect trapped under his skin.

Eddie swallowed. "Richie?"

"No. It's Queen Mary of Scotland."

Eddie smiled, then he saw Stan frowning, erasing it immediately. "What's up?"

"Ouch! My heart just broke, Eds! What happened to your warm voice?"

"I'm hanging up, Richie," Eddie wasn't actually going to do it, he just wanted to hear his reaction.

"Wait, no! I'm sorry, bad time for jokes." Richie chuckled but then cleared his throat. "Is Ben there?" His voice drastically changed.

Eddie frowned. "Ben? No. Why would he be here?"

Richie's answering breath echoed down the phone line like a gasp. "The thing is ... he's *gone*."

2. The Hunter's Moon

Mike was an easy target for beautiful girls, beautiful people in general, which is why he almost got a heart attack when he saw Beverly Marsh for the first time.

He wasn't scared of her, or anything. But she reminded him of a person he rather not think about, ever.

His older brother, Andy, had been born with his mother's brown skin and huge dark eyes, and he'd turned out to be the sort of person who lit the wings of butterflies on fire to watch them burn and die as they flew. He'd tormented Mike as well, in small and petty ways at first, pinching him where the bruises wouldn't show, switching the shampoo of his bottle for bleach. Mike had gone to his parents but they hadn't believed him. No one had, looking at Andy; they'd confused beauty with innocence and harmlessness.

When he broke Mike's arm in ninth grade, he ran away from home, but his parents brought him back. In tenth grade, Andy was knocked down in the street by a hit-and-run driver and killed instantly. Standing next to his parents at the graveside, Mike had been ashamed by his own overwhelming sense of relief. God, he thought, would surely punish him for being glad that his brother was dead.

The next year, He did. Mike met Audra. Long red hair, long eyelashes, flat stomach, defined hips. He never thought she'd go for him—her type usually preferred tanny, athletic, handsome boys—but she seemed to like his rounded shape. The first few months were like a dream; the last few months like a nightmare. She became possessive, controlling.

When he tried to break up with her, she knocked him in his own backyard, before he ran inside and slammed the door. His friends started to make fun of him. *Ow, his girlfriend hit him, poor baby!, Aren't you a man?, You're so weak!*

Later, he let her see him kissing another girl, just to get the point across that it was over. He didn't even remember that girl's name anymore. What he did remember was walking home that night, the

rain misting his hair, mud splattering up the legs of his jeans as he took a shortcut through the park near his house. He remembered the dark shape exploding out from behind the metal merry-go-round, the huge wet wolf body knocking him into the mud, the savage pain as its jaws clamped down on his throat. He'd screamed and thrashed, tasting his own hot blood in his mouth, his brain screaming: *This is impossible. Impossible.* There weren't wolves in New Jersey, not in his ordinary suburban neighborhood, not in the twenty-first century.

His cries brought lights on in the nearby houses, one after another of the windows lighting up like struck matches. The wolf let him go, its jaws trailing ribbons of blood and torn flesh.

Twenty-four stitches later, he was back in his bedroom, his mother hovering anxiously. The emergency room doctor had said the bite looked like a large dog's, but Mike knew better. Before the wolf had turned to race away, he'd heard a hot, familiar whispered voice in his ear, "You're mine now. "

He never saw Audra again—she and her parents packed up their apartment and moved, and none of her friends knew where she'd gone, or would admit they did. He was only half-surprised the next full moon when the pains started: tearing pains that ripped up and down his legs, forcing him to the ground, bending his spine the way a magician might bend a spoon. When his teeth burst out of his gums and rattled to the floor like spilled Chiclets, he fainted. Or thought he did. He woke up miles away from his house, naked and covered in blood, the scar on his throat pulsing like a heartbeat. That night he hopped the train to Manhattan. It wasn't a hard decision. It was bad enough being black in his conservative suburban neighborhood. God knew what they'd do to a werewolf.

It hadn't been that hard to find a pack to fall in with. There were several of them in Manhattan alone. He wound up with the downtown pack, the ones who slept in the old police station in Chinatown.

Pack leaders were mutable. There'd been Kito first, then Véronique, then Gabriel, and now Jim. He'd liked Gabriel all right, but Jim was better. He had a trustworthy look and kind blue eyes and wasn't too handsome, so he didn't dislike him on the spot. Mike was comfortable

enough here with the pack, sleeping in the old police station, playing cards and eating Chinese food on nights when the moon wasn't full, hunting through the park when it was, and the next day drinking off the hangover of the Change at the Hunter's Moon, one of the city's better underground werewolf bars. There was ale by the yard, and nobody ever carded you to see if you were under twenty-one. Being a lycanthrope made you grow up fast, and as long as you sprouted hair and fangs once a month, you were good to drink at the Moon, no matter how old you were in mundane years.

These days he hardly thought of his family at all, but when the redheaded girl stalked her way into the bar, Mike stiffened all over. She didn't look like Audra, not exactly—Audra had had longer hair and was taller. But they had the same lean bodies, the same way of walking, the same eye color.

She sat in front of the counter, where Mike, behind it, was cleaning a glass with a white piece of cloth. "Please don't tell me you're a werewolf or something."

His voice was nothing like Audra's, that was a good thing.

Mike took a deep breath. "Is that so obvious?"

The girl was drumming her fingers against the wood. "Well, given the fact that this place is called 'The Hunter's Moon', there's more pictures of a moon than in an astronomy museum, and I think I saw a man with long fangs smiling at me." Her tone was playful. "You guys really need to be more subtle."

Mike smiled. "Well, I definitely will take it into consideration, thank you."

"So, do you have drinks here? Or do werewolves have *special* drinks?"

"I need to see your ID." Mike raised his hand, but then he started laughing at seeing her scared face. "Just joking. But, why the sudden need for a drink, you seem...young."

The girl frowned. "How *old* are you?"

"I'm turning sixteen next month." Mike said, honestly.

"But how are you working here? Don't you have school?"

Mike left the glass on the counter and exhaled. "I don't go to school anymore, I don't think it was for me. And I work here because werewolves don't really care if you're sixteen or thirty or even five years old, you have to be a part of the pack and do the things they do."

She nodded. "Well, I need a drink because... I don't know, you're probably gonna get bored. You have better stuff to do than hearing a sixteen year old girl complaining about everything."

Mike shrugged. "I don't have many friends here, I could use some distraction." He raised a finger. "But if it's boyfriend problems, forget it."

She gave a little smile. "I found out two weeks ago that I'm a witch, my friend is a Shadowhunter, and he has a messed up family. I don't know if I'm going to school anymore, I can't even look at my parents in the eye, knowing what they know, or *knew*."

"Wow," Mike sounded surprised. "Those *are* problems." He grabbed a bottle of *Red Stripe*, poured the content in two little glasses and handed it one to her. "Directly imported from Jamaica. It's not my favorite, but I think it serves for the occasion." He raised his glass, she did the same. "For us, Downworlders. For letting us being who we really want to be."

They clinked their glasses and laughing, started to drink. The girl closed her eyes and gasped. "It's so... sweet."

"I know," Mike already finished his cup. "So, do you have a name?" As the girl raised her eyebrow, he immediately corrected. "I mean, it's not like we're ever see each other again, right? I just need something to recognize you."

"Beverly." The girl said. "You have a name? Or should I just call you Wolfie?"

"Mike Hanlon." He raised his hand to her, she shook it slowly, he felt

her sweaty hand, probably from walking a lot, and immediately pulled it away.

Beverly pulled out her phone from her bag and gasped at the screen. "Oh my God! It's almost ten! I need to go!" She immediately started to dig in her pockets for money, he guessed. "Oh crap," she whispered, then she looked at Mike. "I'm sorry, I don't have—"

Mike gently touched her arm. "Don't worry, it's on the house." He gave her a reassuring smile. "Take care, okay?"

Beverly nodded. "Thanks, Wolfie."

"It's Mike," he said smiling as she was leaving the bar.

Mike could hear her saying. "*Sure, Wolfie!*"

After she left, Lucas, the only friend his age, approached Mike. "*Someone has a crush.*" He said in a singing tone.

Mike playfully smacked his arm. "Shut up, idiot."

He had hooked up with Lucas a long time ago, when he was doubting his sexuality, but nothing serious, he wasn't Mike's type.

"You should know better than to go after redheads, Mike." Lucas said simply before leaving. Leaving Mike in confusion, he wasn't after Beverly, they literally just met five minutes ago. He wasn't after her, *right?*

A rush of murmurs swept through the bar on the heels of a boy's arrival, like the froth of a wave spreading out from the stern of a boat. The boy acted as if he didn't notice anything, hooking a bar stool toward himself with a booted foot and settling onto it with his elbows on the bar. Mike heard him order a shot of single malt in the quiet that followed the murmurs. He downed half the drink with a neat flip of his wrist. The liquor was the same dark gold color as his hair. When he lifted his hand to set the glass back down on the bar, Mike saw the thick coiling black Marks on his wrists and the backs of his hands.

Lucas, who came back, muttered something under his breath that

sounded like “Nephilim.”

Oh, that's what all the fuss is about. A Shadowhunter, a member of the arcane world's secret police force. They upheld the Law, backed by the Covenant, and you couldn't become one of them: You had to be *born* into it. Blood made them what they were. There were a lot of rumors about them, most unflattering: They were haughty, proud, cruel; they looked down on and despised Downworlders. There were few things a lycanthrope liked less than a Shadowhunter—except maybe a vampire.

People also said that the Shadowhunters killed demons. Mike remembered when he'd first heard that demons existed and had been told about what they did. It had given him a headache. Vampires and werewolves were just people with a disease, that much he understood, but expecting him to believe in all that heaven and hell crap, demons and angels, and still nobody could tell him for sure if there was a God or not, or where you went after you died? It wasn't fair. He believed in demons now—he'd seen enough of what they did that he wasn't able to deny it—but he wished he didn't have to.

“I take it,” the boy said, leaning his elbows onto the bar, “that you don't serve Silver Bullet here. Too many bad associations?” His eyes gleamed, narrow and shining like the moon at a quarter full.

The bartender, Freaky Pete, just looked at the boy and shook his head in disgust. If the boy hadn't been a Shadowhunter, Mike guessed, Pete would have tossed him out of the Moon, but instead he just walked to the other end of the bar and busied himself polishing glasses.

“Actually,” said Lucas, who was unable to stay out of anything, “we don't serve it because it's really crappy beer.”

The boy turned his narrow, shining gaze on Lucas, and smiled delightedly. Most people didn't smile delightedly when Lucas looked at them funny: Lucas was six-and-a-half feet tall, with a thick scar that disfigured half his face where silver powder had burned his skin. Lucas wasn't one of the overnights, the pack who lived in the police station, sleeping in the old cells. He had his own apartment, even a job.

The boy's eyes slid over Mike as if he were invisible and went back to Lucas. "I don't suppose you'd like to tell me what happened to your face? It looks like—" And here he leaned forward and said something to Lucas so quietly that Mike didn't hear it. The next thing he knew, Lucas was swinging a blow at the boy that should have shattered his jaw, only the boy was no longer there. He was standing a good five feet away, laughing, as Lucas' fist connected with his abandoned glass and sent it soaring across the bar to strike the opposite wall in a shower of shattering glass.

Mike barely heard the door open, and a redheaded girl came running, Beverly. She approached Ben and did something with her hand that made Ben stop. "*What the hell is going on?*"

Ben didn't look at her, instead, he shrugged his shoulders and got back to his seat.

Freaky Pete was around the side of the bar, his big fist knotted in Lucas's shirt. "That's enough," he said. "Lucas, why don't you take a walk and cool down."

Lucas twisted in Pete's grasp. "Take a walk? Did you hear—"

"I heard." Pete's voice was low. "He's a Shadowhunter. Walk it off, cub."

Lucas swore and pulled away from the bartender. He stalked toward the exit, his shoulders stiff with rage. The door banged shut behind him.

Mike looked at Beverly, who was shaking her head in disappointment. "How—"

"I forgot my phone here, I got back to retrieve it." She said before heading to where she was seated, an iPhone with a purple case was on the seat where Beverly had been minutes ago. "What happened?"

Mike shrugged. "Shadowhunters privileges, it's normal that a werewolf is upset."

"More like, *enraged*." The boy said, drinking from his cup.

Beverly scoffed. "Ben, what the hell is wrong with you?"

The boy, Ben, looked at her now. Mike could notice, even from afar, that Ben's face almost softened but just as quickly, it went away. "I'm not in the mood to chat."

"You're not in the mood to do anything, I imagine." Beverly crossed her arms. "You know I could tell Richie or Bill what happened."

Ben shrugged. "Go ahead, then."

"Ben, you're not like this, I know you."

Ben scoffed. "You *know* me? For like, a week now? Don't be ridiculous—"

"I should've just bought a new phone," Beverly sighed. "I'm outta here." She said before storming out, not even glancing back at Mike. But before she opened the door, it flew open. Lucas was standing there in the doorway, Beverly gave a scream of shock.

It took a moment for Mike to realize that the front of Lucas' shirt and his sleeves were soaked with blood. Mike slid off his stool and ran to him. "Lucas! Are you hurt?"

His face was gray, his silvery scar standing out on his cheek like a piece of twisted wire. "An attack," Lucas said. "There's a body in the alley. A dead kid. Blood—everywhere."

He shook his head, looked down at himself. "Not my blood. I'm fine."

"A body? But who—"

Lucas' reply was swallowed in the commotion. Beverly immediately left the bar. Seats were abandoned as the pack rushed to the door. Pete came out from behind his counter and pushed his way through the mob. Only the Shadowhunter boy stayed where he was, his head bent over his drink.

Through gaps in the crowd around the door, Mike caught a glimpse of the gray paving of the alley, splashed with blood. It was still wet and had run between the cracks in the paving like the tendrils of a

red plant. "His *throat* cut?" Pete was saying to Lucas, whose color had come back. "How—"

"There was someone in the alley. Someone kneeling over him," Lucas said. His voice was tight. "Not like a person—like a shadow. They ran off when they saw me. He was still alive. A little. I bent down over him, but—" Lucas shrugged. It was a casual movement, but the cords in his neck were standing out like thick roots wrapping a tree trunk. "He died without saying anything."

"Vampires," said a buxom female lycanthrope—her name was Ava, Mike thought—who was standing by the door. "The Night Children. It can't have been anything else." Lucas looked at her, then turned and stalked across the room toward the bar. He grabbed the Shadowhunter by the back of the jacket—or reached out as if he meant to, but the boy was already on his feet, turning fluidly. "What's your problem, werewolf?"

Lucas' hand was still outstretched. "Are you deaf, Nephilim?" he snarled. "There's a dead boy in the alley. One of ours."

"Do you mean a lycanthrope or some other sort of Downworlder?" Ben arched his light eyebrows. "You all blend together to me."

There was a low growl—from Freaky Pete, Mike noted with some surprise. He had come back into the bar and was surrounded by the rest of the pack, their eyes fixed on the Shadowhunter. "He was only a cub," said Pete. "His name was Noah."

The name didn't ring any bells for Mike, but he saw the tight set of Pete's jaw and felt a flutter in his stomach. The pack was on the warpath now and if the Shadowhunter had any sense, he'd be backpedaling like crazy. He wasn't, though. He was just standing there looking at them with those gold eyes and that funny smile on his face. "A lycanthrope boy?" he said.

"He was one of the pack," said Pete. "He was only fifteen."

"And what exactly do you expect me to do about it?" said the boy.

Pete was staring incredulously. "You're Nephilim," he said. "The Clave

owes us protection in these circumstances."

Ben looked around the bar, slowly and with such a look of insolence that a flush spread over Pete's face. "I don't see anything you need protecting from here," said the boy.

"There's a dead body outside this bar's front door," said Lucas, enunciating carefully. "Don't you think—"

"I think it's a little too late for him to need protection," said Ben, "if he's already dead."

"So you're going to do nothing?" Beverly said. "Is that it?"

"I'm going to finish my drink," said Ben.

"So that's the attitude of the Clave, a week after the Accords?" said Pete with disgust. "The death of Downworlders is nothing to you?"

Ben smiled, and Mike's spine prickled. He looked exactly like Andy just before Andy reached out and yanked the wings off a ladybug. "How like Downworlders," he said, "expecting the Clave to clean your mess up for you. As if we could be bothered just because some stupid cub decided to splatter-paint himself all over your alley—"

And he used a word, a word for weres that they never used themselves, a filthily unpleasant word that implied an improper relationship between wolves and human women. Before anyone else could move, Lucas flung himself at the Shadowhunter-

"That's enough."

It was Jim's voice, quiet, steady as a heartbeat. It was strange how you always knew your pack leader's voice. Mike turned and saw him standing just at the entrance to the bar, one hand against the wall. He looked not just tired, but *ravaged*, as if something were tearing him down from the inside; still, his voice was calm as he said again, "That's enough. Leave the boy alone."

The pack melted away from the Shadowhunter, leaving just Lucas still standing there, defiant, one hand still gripping the back of the Shadowhunter's shirt, the other holding a short-bladed knife. "He's

not a boy," Lucas said. "He's a Shadowhunter."

"They're welcome enough here," said Jim, his tone neutral. "They are our allies."

"He said it didn't matter," said Lucas angrily. "About Noah—"

"I know," Jim said quietly. His eyes shifted to the Ben. "Did you come in here just to pick a fight, Ben *Denbrough*?"

Ben smiled. "Good to see you too, Jim."

Lucas, startled to hear their pack leader's first name come out of the Shadowhunter's mouth, let go of the back of Ben's shirt. "I didn't know—"

"There's nothing to know," said Jim, the tiredness in his eyes creeping into his voice.

Freaky Pete spoke, his voice a bass rumble. "He said the Clave wouldn't care about the death of a single lycanthrope, even a child. And it's a week after the Accords, Jim."

"Ben doesn't speak for the Clave," said Luke, "and there's nothing he could have done even if he'd wanted to. Isn't that right?" He looked at Ben, who was very pale.

"How do you—"

"I know what happened," said Jim. "With Sharon."

Ben stiffened, and for a moment Mike saw through the Andy-like savage amusement to what was underneath, and it was dark and agonized and reminded him more of his own eyes in the mirror than of his brother's. "Who told you? Eddie?"

"Not Eddie." Mike had never heard Jim speak that name before, but he said it with a tone that implied that this was someone special to him. "I'm the pack leader, Ben. I hear things. Now come on. Let's go to Pete's office and talk."

Ben hesitated for a moment before shrugging. "Fine," he said, "but

you owe me for the Scotch I didn't drink."

Notes for the Chapter:

Finally we got to meet Mike Hanlon <33333333333
;3

3. Humanity

"That was my last guess," Eddie said with a defeated sigh, sinking down onto the steps outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art and staring disconsolately down Fifth Avenue.

"It was a good one." Stan sat down beside him, long legs sprawled out in front of him. "I mean, he's a guy who likes weapons and killing, so why not the biggest collection of weapons in the whole city? And I'm always up for a visit to Arms and Armor, anyway. Gives me ideas for my campaign."

Eddie looked at him in surprise. "You still gaming with Belch and Victor and Patrick?"

"Sure. Why wouldn't I be?"

"I thought gaming might have lost some of its appeal for you since..." *Since our real lives started to resemble one of your campaigns.* Complete with good guys, bad guys, really nasty magic, and important enchanted objects you had to find if you wanted to win the game.

Except in a game, the good guys always won, defeated the bad guys and came home with the treasure. Whereas in real life, they'd lost the treasure, and sometimes Eddie still wasn't clear on who the bad and good guys actually were. He looked at Stan and felt a wave of sadness. If Stan did give up gaming, it would be Eddie's fault, just like everything that had happened to him in the past weeks had been. Eddie remembered his white face at the sink a few hours ago. "Stan —," he began.

"Right now I'm playing a half-troll cleric who wants revenge on the Orcs who killed his family," Stan said cheerfully. "It's awesome."

Eddie laughed just as his cell phone rang. He dug it out of his pocket and looked at the screen; it was Beverly. "We didn't find him," he said, before she could say hello.

"No. But I did."

Eddie sat up straight. "You're kidding. Is he there? Can I talk to him?" Eddie caught sight of Stan looking at him sharply and dropped his voice. "Is he all right?"

"Mostly."

"What do you mean, mostly?"

"He picked a fight with a werewolf pack. He's got some cuts and bruises."

Eddie half-closed his eyes. *Why, oh why, had Ben picked a fight with a pack of wolves? What had possessed him?*

"I think you should come down here," Beverly said. "Someone has to reason with him and I'm not having much luck."

"Where are you?" Eddie asked. She told him. A bar called the Hunter's Moon on Hester Street. Eddie wondered if it was glamoured.

Eddie turned to Stan, who was staring at him with raised eyebrows. "The prodigal returns?"

"Sort of." Eddie scrambled to his feet and stretched his tired legs, mentally calculating how long it would take them to get to Chinatown on the train and whether it was worth shelling out the pocket money Jim had given him for a cab. Probably not, he decided—if they got stuck in traffic, it would take longer than the subway.

"...come with you?" Stan finished, standing up. He was on the step below Eddie, which made them almost the same height. "What do you think?"

Eddie opened his mouth, then closed it again quickly. "Er..."

He sounded resigned. "You haven't heard a word I said these past two minutes, have you?"

"No," Eddie admitted. "I was thinking about Ben. It sounded like he was in bad shape. Sorry."

Stan's brown eyes darkened. "I take it you're rushing off to bind up

his wounds?"

"Beverly asked me to come down," he said. "I was hoping you'd come with me."

Stan kicked at the step above his with a booted foot. "I will, but—why? Can't she return Ben to the Institute without your help?"

"He's my brother," Eddie said. "I have to go."

Stan looked as if he were too weary to even sigh. "Then I'll go with you."

The back office of Hunter's Moon was down a narrow corridor strewn with sawdust. Here and there the sawdust was churned up by footsteps and spotted with a dark liquid that didn't look like beer. The whole place smelled smoky and gamy, a little like—Eddie had to admit it, though he wouldn't have said so to Jim—wet dog.

"He's not in a very good mood," said Jim, pausing in front of a closed door. "I shut him up in Freaky Pete's office after he nearly killed half my pack with his bare hands. He looked from Eddie's baffled face to Stan's. "What?"

"I can't believe he came here," Eddie said.

"I can't believe you know someone named Freaky Pete," said Stan.

"I know a lot of people," said Jim. "Not that Freaky Pete is strictly people, but I'm hardly one to talk."

"Where's Beverly?" Stan asked, looking around on the room.

"She's probably outside, with Mike."

"Who's Mike?" Eddie frowned.

"Just a werewolf kid." Jim swung the office door wide. Inside was a plain room, windowless, the walls hung with sports pennants. There was a paper-strewn desk weighted down with a small TV set, and

behind it, in a chair whose leather was so cracked it looked like veined marble, was Ben.

The moment the door opened, Ben seized up a yellow pencil lying on the desk and threw it. It sailed through the air and struck the wall just next to Jim's head, where it stuck, vibrating. Jim's eyes widened.

Ben smiled faintly. "Sorry, I didn't realize it was you."

Eddie hadn't seen Ben in days, and he looked different somehow—not just the bloody face and bruises, which were clearly new, but the skin on his face seemed tighter, the bones more prominent. Jim indicated Stan and Eddie with a wave of his hand. "I brought some people to see you."

Ben's eyes moved to them. They were as blank as if they had been painted on.

"I don't want him in here." Ben jerked his chin toward Stan.

"That's hardly fair." Eddie was indignant. Had he forgotten that Stan had saved Bill's life, possibly all their lives?

Stan waved a hand. "It's fine. I'll wait in the hallway." He left, refraining from banging the door shut behind him, though Eddie could tell he wanted to.

He turned back to Ben. "Do you have to be so—," he began, but stopped when he saw Ben's face. It looked stripped down, oddly vulnerable.

"Unpleasant?" Ben finished. "Only on days when my adoptive mother tosses me out of the house with instructions never to darken her door again."

Jim frowned. "Sharon and Zack Denbrough are not my favorite people, but I can't believe Sharon would do that."

Ben looked surprised. "You know them? The Denbroughs?"

"They were in the Circle with me," said Jim. "I was surprised when I heard they were heading the Institute here. It seems they made a deal

with the Clave, after the Uprising, to ensure some kind of lenient treatment for themselves, while Keene—well, we know what happened to him." He was silent a moment. "Did Sharon say why she was exiling you, so to speak?"

"She doesn't believe that I thought I was Daniel Hanscom's son. She accused me of being in it with Pennywise all along—saying I helped him get away with the Mortal Cup."

"Then why would you still be here?" Eddie asked. "Why wouldn't you have fled with him?"

"She wouldn't say, but I suspect she thinks I stayed to be a spy. A viper in their bosoms. Not that she used the word 'bosoms,' but the thought was there."

"A spy for Pennywise?" Jim sounded dismayed.

"She thinks Pennywise assumed that because of their affection for me, she and Zack would believe whatever I said. So Sharon has decided that the solution to that is not to have any affection for me."

"Affection doesn't work like that." Jim shook his head. "You can't turn it off, like a tap. Especially if you're a parent."

"They're not really my parents."

"There's more to parentage than blood. They've been your parents for seven years in all the ways that matter. Sharon is just hurt."

"Hurt?" Ben sounded incredulous. "*She's* hurt?"

"She loved Pennywise, remember," said Jim. "As we all did. He hurt her badly. She doesn't want his son to do the same. She worries you've lied to them. That the person she thought you were all these years was a ruse, a trick. You have to reassure her."

Ben's expression was a perfect mixture of stubbornness and astonishment. "Sharon is an adult! She shouldn't need reassurance from me."

"Oh, come on, Ben," Eddie said. "You can't wait for perfect behavior

from everyone. Adults screw up too. Go back to the Institute and talk to her rationally. Be a man."

"I won't go back to a place where I'm not trusted. I'm not ten years old anymore. I can take care of myself."

Jim looked as if he weren't sure about that. "Where will you go? How will you live?"

Ben's eyes glittered. "I'm almost seventeen. Practically an adult. Any adult Shadowhunter is entitled to—"

"Any adult. But you're not one. You can't draw a salary from the Clave because you're too young, and in fact the Denbroughs are bound by the Law to care for you. If they won't, someone else would be appointed or—"

"Or what?" Ben sprang up from the chair. "I'll go to an orphanage in Derry? Be dumped on some family I've never met? I can get a job in the mundane world for a year, live like one of them—"

"No, you can't," Eddie said. "I ought to know, Ben, I was one of them. You're too young for any job you'd want and besides, the skills you have—well, most professional killers are older than you. And they're criminals."

"I'm not a killer."

"If you lived in the mundane world," said Jim, "that's all you'd be."

Ben stiffened, his mouth tightening, and Eddie knew Jim's words had hit him where it hurt. "You don't get it," he said, a sudden desperation in his voice. "I can't go back. Sharon wants me to say I hate Pennywise. And I can't do that." Ben raised his chin, his jaw set, his eyes on Jim as if he half-expected the older man to respond with derision or even horror. After all, Jim had more reason to hate Pennywise than almost anyone else in the world.

"I know," said Jim. "I loved him once too."

Ben exhaled, almost a sound of relief, and Eddie thought suddenly, *This is why he came here, to this place. Not just to start a fight, but to get*

to Jim. Because Jim would understand.

"Look, Ben. You're absolutely welcome to stay with me as long as you need to. I want you to know that." Jim said.

"Thanks," said Ben. His voice was even, calm.

"But," Jim went on, "I think you should at least go back to the Institute long enough to talk to Sharon and find out what's really going on. It sounds like there's more to this than she's telling you. More, maybe, than you were willing to hear."

Ben nodded. "All right." His voice was rough. "But on one condition. I don't want to go by myself."

"I'll go with you," Eddie said quickly.

"I know." Ben's voice was low. "And I want you to. But I want Jim to come too."

Jim looked startled. "Ben—I've lived here fifteen years and I've never gone to the Institute. Not once. I doubt Sharon is any fonder of me—"

"Please," Ben said, and though his voice was flat and he spoke quietly, Eddie could almost feel, like a palpable thing, the pride he'd had to fight down to say that single word.

"All right." Jim nodded, the nod of a pack leader used to doing what he had to do, whether he wanted to or not. "Then I'll come with you."

Stan leaned against the wall in the corridor outside Pete's office and tried not to feel sorry for himself.

The day had started off well. Fairly well, anyway. First there'd been that bad episode with the Dracula film on television making him feel sick and faint, bringing up all the emotions, the longings, he'd been trying to push down and forget about. And now, Eddie was there with Ben. It's not like he disliked Ben, he was cool. If Stan had to pick between Richie and Ben, he would definitely pick Ben. Just thinking about Richie made Stan move uncomfortably.

He remembered sitting on the porch steps of Jim's house, watching Eddie as he explained who Richie was, what he did, while Richie examined his nails and looked superior. Stan had barely heard him. He'd been too busy noticing how Eddie *looked* at the boy with the strange tattoos and the angular, pretty face. Too pretty, Stan had thought, but Eddie clearly hadn't thought so: He'd looked at him as though he were one of his animated heroes come to life. Stan had never seen him look at anyone that way before.

"Hey, there." Someone was coming along the corridor, a not-very-tall someone picking their way gingerly among the blood spatters. "Are you waiting to see Jim? Is he in there?"

"Not exactly." Stan moved away from the door. "I mean, sort of. He's in there with a friend of mine."

The person, who had just reached him, stopped and stared. Stan could see that it was a boy, about sixteen years old, with smooth light brown skin and his face was nearly the exact shape of a heart. He had a compact, firm body. "That guy from the bar? The Shadowhunter?"

Stan shrugged.

"Well, I hate to tell you this," the boy said, "but your friend is an asshole."

"He's not my friend," Stan said. "And trust me, there are people who are worse." He thought immediately of Richie.

"But I thought you said—"

"I'm waiting for his brother," said Stan. "He's my best friend."

"And he's in there with him right now?" The boy jerked his thumb toward the door. His jeans were worn but clean and when he turned his head, Stan saw the scar that ran along his neck, just above the collar of his T-shirt. "Well," the boy said grudgingly, "I know about asshole brothers. I guess it's not his fault."

"It's not," said Stab. "But Ben may listen to him."

"He didn't strike me as the listening type," said the boy, and caught

Stan's sidelong look. Amusement flickered across his face. "You're looking at my scar. It's where I was bitten."

"Bitten? You mean you're a—"

"A werewolf," said the boy. "Like everyone else here. Except you, and the Shadowhunter, and his brother."

"But you weren't always a werewolf. I mean, you weren't born one."

"Most of us aren't," said the boy. "That's what makes us different than your Shadowhunter buddies."

"What?"

He smiled fleetingly. "We were human once."

Stan said nothing to that. After a moment the boy held his hand out. "I'm Mike."

"Stan." He shook Mike's hand. It was dry and soft. He remembered what Jim said earlier. "Jim said you were at the bar with Beverly."

Mike looked taken aback for a moment. "Oh, I didn't know she had a boyfriend, we were just talking, I swear."

Stan laughed, and clapped Mike's shoulder. "Relax! She's not my girlfriend, she's like a sister to me." He said. Color came back to Mike's face. "Is she here?"

"No, she's at the bar. I can tell her to come here."

Stan waved his hand. "Nah, I'll see her later, anyways." He raised his head. "What happened at the bar?"

"Ben tore up the bar. Punched out my friend Lucas. Even knocked a couple of the pack unconscious."

"Are they all right?" Stan was alarmed. Ben didn't seem like a violent person, but clearly Stan didn't know him well. "Did they get to a doctor?"

"A warlock," said Mike. "We don't have much to do with mundane doctors, our kind."

"Downworlders?"

His eyebrows went up. "Someone taught you all the lingo, didn't they?"

Stan was nettled. "How do you know I'm not one of them? Or you? A Shadowhunter or a Downworlder, or—"

Mike shook his head. "It just shines out of you," he said, a little bitterly, "your *humanity*."

The intensity in his voice almost made Mike shiver. "I could knock on the door," Stan suggested, feeling suddenly lame. "If you want to talk to Jim."

Mike shrugged. "Just tell him Eleven is here, checking out the scene in the alley." Stan must have looked startled, because Mike said, "Jane Ives. She's a witch."

I know, Stan wanted to say, but didn't. The whole conversation had been weird enough already. "Okay."

Mike turned as if to go, but paused partway down the hall, one hand on the doorjamb. "Does Beverly have one? A boyfriend?" Mike sounded shy.

Stan frowned, confused. "Um, no. Why?"

"Just curious." Mike simply said. "See you around, Stan."

"Sure."

4. Surface Tension

The first time Eddie had ever seen the Institute, it had looked like a dilapidated church, its roof broken in, stained yellow police tape holding the door closed. Now he didn't have to concentrate to dispel the illusion. Even from across the street, he could see it exactly as it was, a towering Gothic cathedral whose spires seemed to pierce the dark blue sky like knives.

Jim fell silent. It was clear from the look on his face that some kind of struggle was taking place inside him. As they mounted the steps, Ben reached inside his shirt as if from habit, but when he drew his hand out, it was empty. He laughed without any mirth. "I forgot. Sharon took my keys from me before I left."

"Of course she did." Jim was standing directly in front of the Institute's doors. He gently touched the symbols carved into the wood, just below the architrave. "These doors are just like the ones at the Council Hall in Derry. I never thought I would see their like again."

Eddie almost felt guilty interrupting Jim's reverie, but there were practical matters to attend to. "If we don't have a key—"

"One shouldn't be necessary. An Institute should be open to any of the Nephilim who mean no harm to the inhabitants."

"What if they mean harm to us?" Ben muttered.

Jim's mouth quirked at the corner. "I don't think that makes a difference."

"Yeah, the Clave always stacks the deck its way." Ben's voice sounded muffled—his lower lip was swelling, his left eyelid turning purple.

"Did she take your stele, too?" Eddie wondered.

"I didn't take anything when I left," Ben said.

Jim looked at him with some concern. "Every Shadowhunter must

have a stele.”

“So I’ll get another one,” said Ben, and put his hand to the Institute’s door. “In the name of the Clave,” he said, “I ask entry to this holy place. And in the name of the Angel Raziel, I ask your blessings upon my mission against—”

The doors swung open. Eddie could see the cathedral’s interior through them, the shadowy darkness illuminated here and there by candles in tall iron candelabras.

“Well, that’s convenient,” said Ben.

“The Angel knows what is your mission,” Jim said. “You don’t have to say the words aloud, Jonathan.”

For a moment Eddie thought he saw something flicker across Ben’s face—uncertainty, surprise—and maybe even relief? But all he said was, “Don’t call me that. It’s not my name.”

They made their way through the ground floor of the cathedral, past the empty pews and the light burning forever on the altar. Jim looked around him curiously, and even seemed surprised when the elevator, like a gilded birdcage, arrived to carry them up. “This must have been Sharon’s idea,” he said as they stepped into it. “It’s entirely her taste.”

“It’s been here as long as I have,” said Ben, as the door clanged shut behind them. The ride up was brief, and none of them spoke. Eddie played nervously with the fringe of his scarf. He felt a little guilty about having told Stan to go home and wait for his call. Eddie had seen from the annoyed set of his shoulders as he stalked off down Canal Street that he’d felt summarily dismissed. Still, Eddie couldn’t imagine having him—a mundane—here while Jim petitioned Sharon Denbrough on Ben’s behalf; it would just make everything awkward.

The elevator came to a clanging stop and they stepped out to find Mews waiting for them in the entryway, a slightly dilapidated red bow around his neck. Ben bent to rub the back of his hand along the cat’s head. “Where’s Sharon?”

Mews made a noise in his throat, halfway between a purr and a

growl, and headed off down the corridor. They followed, Ben silent, Jim glancing around with evident curiosity. "I never thought I'd see the inside of this place."

Eddie asked, "Does it look like you thought it would?"

"I've been to the Institutes in London and Paris; this is not unlike those, no. Though somehow—"

"Somehow what?" Ben was several strides ahead.

"Colder," said Jim.

Ben said nothing. They had reached the library. Mews sat down as if to indicate that he planned to go no farther. Voices were faintly audible through the thick wooden door, but Ben pushed it open without knocking and went inside.

Eddie heard a voice exclaim in surprise. For a moment his heart contracted as he thought of Keene, who had all but lived in this room. Keene, with his gravelly voice, and Gard, the raven who was his almost constant companion—and who had, at Keene's orders, nearly ripped out his eyes.

It wasn't Keene, of course. Behind the enormous mahogany plank desk that balanced on the backs of two kneeling stone angels sat a middle-aged woman with Bill's auburn hair and a thin, wiry build. She wore a neat black suit, very plain, in contrast to the multiple brightly colored rings that burned on her fingers.

Beside her stood another figure: a slender teenage boy, slightly built, with curling dark hair and honey-colored skin. As he turned to look at them, Eddie couldn't hold back an exclamation of surprise. "*Adrian?*"

For a moment the boy looked taken aback. Then he smiled, his teeth very white and sharp—not surprising, considering that he was a vampire. "*Dios,*" he said, addressing himself to Ben. "What happened to you, brother? You look as if a pack of wolves tried to tear you apart."

"That's either a shockingly good guess," said Ben, "or you heard

about what happened.”

Adrian's smile turned into a grin. “I hear things.”

The woman behind the desk rose to her feet. “Ben,” she said, her voice full of anxiety. “Did something happen? Why are you back so soon? I thought you were going to stay with—” Her gaze moved past him to Jim and Eddie. “And who are you?”

“Ben's brother,” Eddie said.

Sharon's eyes rested on Eddie. “Yes, I can see it. You look like Pennywise.” She turned back to Ben. “You brought your brother with you? And a *mundane*, as well? It's not safe for any of you here right now. And especially a mundane—”

Jim, smiling faintly, said, “But I'm not a mundane.”

Sharon's expression changed slowly from bewilderment to shock as she looked at Jim—really looked at him—for the first time. “*Jimothy?*”

"Hello, Sharon," said Jim. "It's been a long time."

"Shh! I can't hear what they're saying!"

"Richie are you s-serious right now?"

Richie pushed his ear away from the door and stared at his parabatai, Bill was dressed in his usual blue shirt and elegant pants, no matter how many times Richie told him to not wear them, Bill didn't listen. "Of course I'm serious."

"They're p-probably hearing us right now," Bill sounded bored and annoyed at the same time, which again, it was usual in him.

"If they did, we would be inside hearing ten different types of grounding for us."

"Why do y-you want to listen, anyway?"

Richie licked his lips, considering the thought of telling Bill the truth, that he and Eddie had kissed two days ago, that he was almost desperate of hearing his voice in person again. But no, Richie shrugged. "I'm a sucker for drama, you know me."

"Just admit it, a-already."

Richie swallowed and looked at Bill. "Admit what?"

Bill scoffed. "That you w-want to see Eddie."

"I don't want to see Eddie."

Bill crossed his arms over his chest. "Then we should g-go. Ben will tell us what h-happened."

Richie sighed, defeated. "Fine," He looked at Bill. "How do you feel about it? That Ben is Eddie's brother."

Bill looked confused for a minute, then he dropped his arms. "Ben is *our* brother."

Richie noted that Bill wasn't stuttering, but didn't make a comment on it. "Sure, you're right, I just...I don't know. It feels weird. This whole situation."

"Richie!" They both heard a small voice approaching them, Georgie was using his green pajamas with brown slippers. His blonde hair was a little messy, and he had that usual smiley expression on him.

"Hey, buddy." Richie high-fived Georgie's hand and tapped his shoulder. "What are you doing awake? It's almost ten."

Georgie shrugged. "I couldn't sleep." Then he looked at the door. "What is going on there?"

"N-nothing," Bill grabbed Georgie's shoulder and dragged him away, Richie following. "Just go to s-sleep, okay? It's late."

"But I'm not tired." Georgie whined. "Can't we play something until I fall asleep? I have this new toy soldier-"

"*Georgie*," Bill's tone became harsh. Almost like Sharon's. "I mean it."

Georgie's smile faded, like a lightbulb being turned off. "Fine." He said, before getting out of Bill's grip and heading to his room upstairs.

Richie shook his head in annoyance. "Bill, you sounded just like Sharon. He's just a kid, you know?"

Bill's eyebrows were almost touching. "How do *you* know h-how to treat a kid, huh?"

Richie raised his hands in sign of peace. "Nothing." He didn't wait for Bill to say anything else, Richie was already rushing upstairs, heading to Georgie's room. It was the last room to a large, quiet hall. There was a small bed in one corner, where Georgie laid, looking at the ceiling. An ordinary young kid probably would be crying after being yelled by his older brother, but Georgie wasn't like that. For as long as Richie could remember, Georgie was the strongest kid he had ever met, even when Sharon or Zack were at his most angry stages, Georgie somehow knew what was going on. Richie sometimes wished he could've been like that at his age.

"Hey, little man." Richie sat on the legs of the bed, where Georgie was staring at him with wide eyes. "Bill didn't mean to be so harsh, you know? We're all a little tense."

"Yeah, I noticed." Georgie didn't even ask what *tense* meant. He probably would have read that word in all of those books he read. "*You* seem fine."

Richie exhaled. "Yeah, but you know Bill, he's like a big ogre who just wants to eat," Richie's hand immediately went to Georgie's sides. "Especially little naughty kids!"

Georgie's laugh, Richie was sure of it, could be heard in the entire Institute, it sounded so innocent and light and genuine that Richie started to laugh too. "Stop!" With his little hands, Georgie started to push Richie's hands away.

Richie stopped and pinched his cheek. "Don't be sad now, okay? Bill is gonna apologize, I promise."

Georgie nodded and he yawned. "I'm tired now, I'm gonna fall asleep."

Richie ruffled his hair. "Good night, buddy."

"Good night, Richie." Georgie let out another yawn and turned to the left, so he could sleep better.

Richie got up from the bed and got out of the room. And he realized something, for the first time in days, he felt genuinely happy, even for two minutes.

Sharon's face was very still, and in that moment she looked suddenly much older, older even than Jim. She sat down carefully. "Jimothy" she said again, her hands flat on the desk. "Jimothy Hopper."

Adrian, who had been watching the proceedings with the bright, curious gaze of a bird, turned to Jim. "You killed Gabriel."

Who was Gabriel? Eddie stared at Jim, puzzled. He gave a slight shrug. "I did, yes, just like he killed the pack leader before him. That's how it works with lycanthropes."

Sharon looked up at that. "The pack leader?"

"If you lead the pack now, it's time for us to talk," said Adrian, inclining his head graciously in Jim's direction, though his eyes were wary. "Though not at this exact moment; perhaps."

"I'll send someone over to arrange it," said Jim. "Things have been busy lately. I might be behind on the niceties."

"You might," was all that Adrian said. He turned back to Sharon. "Is our business here concluded?"

Sharon spoke with an effort. "If you say the Night Children aren't involved in these killings, then I'll take you at your word. I'm required to, unless other evidence comes to light."

Adrian frowned. "To light?" he said. "That is not a phrase I like." He

turned then, and Eddie saw with a start that he could see *through* the edges of him, as if Adrian were a photograph that had blurred around the margins. His left hand was transparent, and through it Eddie could see the big metal globe Keene had always kept on the desk. Eddie heard himself make a little noise of surprise as the transparency spread up Adrian's arms from his hands—and down his chest from his shoulders, and in a moment he was gone, like a figure erased from a sketch. Sharon exhaled a sigh of relief.

Eddie gaped. "Is he *dead*?"

"What, Adrian?" said Ben. "Not likely. That was just a projection of him. He can't come into the Institute in his corporeal body."

"Why not?"

"Because this is hallowed ground," said Sharon. "And he is damned." Her wintry eyes lost none of their coldness when she turned her glance on Jim. "You, head of the pack here?" she asked. "I suppose I should hardly be surprised. It does seem to be your method, doesn't it?"

Jim ignored the bitterness in her tone. "Was Adrian here about the cub who was killed today?"

"That, and a dead warlock," Sharon said. "Found murdered downtown, two days apart."

"But why was Adrian here?"

"The warlock was drained of blood," said Sharon. "It seems that whoever murdered the werewolf was interrupted before the blood could be taken, but suspicion naturally fell on the Night Children. The vampire came here to assure me his folk had nothing to do with it."

"Do you believe him?" Ben said.

"I don't care to talk about Clave business with you right now, Ben—especially not in front of Jimothy Hopper."

"I'm just called Jim now," Jim said placidly. "Jimothy sounds

ridiculous."

Sharon shook her head. "I hardly recognized you. You look like a mundane."

"That's the idea, yes."

"We all thought you were dead."

"Hoped," said Jim, still placidly. "Hoped I was dead."S

Sharon looked as if she'd swallowed something sharp. "You might as well sit down," she said finally, pointing toward the chairs in front of the desk. "Now," said Sharon, once they'd taken their seats, "perhaps you might tell me why you're here."

"Ben," said Jim, without preamble, "wants a trial before the Clave. I'm willing to vouch for him. I was there that night at Renwick's, when Pennywise revealed himself. I can confirm that everything Ben says happened is the truth."

"I'm not sure," countered Sharon, "what *your* word is worth."

"I may be a lycanthrope," said Jim, "but I'm also a Shadowhunter. I'm willing to be tried by the Sword, if that will help."

By the Sword? That sounded bad. Eddie looked over at Ben. He was outwardly calm, his fingers laced together in his lap, but there was a shuddering tension about him, as if he were a hairsbreadth from exploding. He caught Eddie's look and said, "The Soul-Sword. The second of the Mortal Instruments. It's used in trials to determine if a Shadowhunter is lying."

"You're not a Shadowhunter," said Sharon to Jim, as if Ben hadn't spoken. "You haven't lived by the Law of the Clave in a long, long time."

"There was a time when you didn't live by it either," said Jim. High color flooded Sharon's cheeks. "I would have thought," he went on, "that by now you would have gotten past not being able to trust anyone, Sharon."

"Some things you never forget," she said. Her voice held a dangerous softness. "You think pretending his own death was the biggest lie Bob ever told us? You think charm is the same as honesty? I used to think so. I was wrong." She stood up and leaned on the table with her thin hands. "He told us he would lay down his life for the Circle and that he expected us to do the same. And we would have—all of us—I know it. I nearly did it." Her gaze swept over Ben and Eddie and her eyes locked with Jim's. "You remember," she said, "the way he told us that the Uprising would be nothing, hardly a battle, a few unarmed ambassadors against the full might of the Circle. I was so confident in our swift victory that when I rode out to Alicante, I left Bill at home in his cradle. I asked Sonia to watch my children while I was away. She refused. I know why now. She *knew*—and so did you. And you didn't warn us."

"I'd tried to warn you about Pennywise," said Jim. "You didn't listen."

"I don't mean about him. I mean about the Uprising! When we arrived, there were fifty of us against five hundred Downworlders—"

"You'd been willing to slaughter them unarmed when you thought there would be only five of them," said Jim quietly.

Sharon's hands clenched on the desk. "We were slaughtered," she said. "In the midst of the carnage, we looked to Pennywise to lead us. But he wasn't there. By that time the Clave had surrounded the Hall of Accords. We thought Pennywise had been killed, we're ready to give our own lives in a final desperate rush. Then I remembered Bill—if I died, what would happen to my little boy?" Her voice caught. "So I laid my arms down and gave myself up to the Clave."

"You did the right thing, Sharon," said Jim.

She turned on him, eyes blazing. "Don't *patronize* me, werewolf. If it weren't for you—"

"Don't yell at him!" Eddie cut in, almost rising to his feet herself. "It's your fault for believing Pennywise in the first place—"

"You think I don't know that?" There was a ragged edge to Sharon's voice now. "Oh, the Clave made that point nicely when they

questioned us—they had the Soul-Sword and they knew when we were lying, but they couldn't make us talk—nothing could make us talk, until—"

"Until what?" It was Jim who spoke. "I've never known. I always wondered what they told you to make you turn on him."

"Just the truth," Sharon said, sounding suddenly tired. "That Pennywise hadn't died there in the Hall. He'd fled—left us there to die without him. He'd died later, we were told, burned to death in his house. The Inquisitor showed us his bones, the charred amulet he used to wear. Of course, that was another lie..." Her voice trailed off, and then she rallied again, her words crisp: "It was all coming apart by then, anyway. We were finally talking to one another, those of us in the Circle. Before the battle, Pennywise had drawn me aside, told me that out of all the Circle, I was the one he trusted most, his closest lieutenant. When the Clave questioned us I found out he'd said the same thing to everyone."

"Hell hath no fury," Ben muttered, so quietly that only Eddie heard him.

"He lied not just to the Clave but to us. He used our loyalty and our affection. Just as he did when he sent you to us," Sharon said, looking directly at Ben now. "And now he's back, and he has the Mortal Cup. He's been planning all this for years, all along, all of it. I can't afford to trust you, Ben. I'm sorry."

Ben said nothing. His face was expressionless, but he'd gone paler as Sharon spoke, his new bruises standing out livid on his jaw and cheek.

"Then what?" Jim said. "What is it you expect him to do? Where is he supposed to go?"

Her eyes rested for a moment on Eddie. "Why not to his brother?" she said. "Family—"

"*Bill* is his brother," interrupted Eddie. "And Richie and Georgie. What are you going to tell them? They'll hate you forever if you throw Ben out of your house."

Sharon's eyes rested on him. "What do you know about it?"

"I know Bill and Richie," said Eddie. The thought of his kiss with Richie came; he pushed it away. "Family is more than blood. Pennywise isn't my father. Jim is. Just like Bill and Georgie and Richie are Ben's family. If you try to tear him out of your family, you'll leave a wound that won't ever heal."

Jim was looking at him with a sort of surprised respect. Something flickered in Sharon's eyes—uncertainty?

"Eddie," Ben said softly. "Enough." He sounded defeated. Eddie turned on Sharon.

"What about the Sword?" he demanded.

Sharon looked at Eddie for a moment with genuine puzzlement. "The Sword?"

"The Soul-Sword," said Eddie. "The one you can use to tell if a Shadowhunter is lying or not. You can use it on Ben."

"That's a good idea." There was a spark of animation in Ben's voice.

"Eddie, you mean well, but you don't know what the Sword entails," Jim said. "The only one who can use it is the Inquisitor."

Ben sat forward. "Then call on her. Call the Inquisitor. I want to end this."

"No," Jim said, but Sharon was looking at Ben.

"The Inquisitor," she said reluctantly, "is already on her way—"

"Sharon." Jim's voice cracked. "Tell me you haven't called her into this!"

"I didn't! Did you think the Clave wouldn't involve itself in this wild tale of Forsaken warriors and Portals and staged deaths? After what Keene did? We're all under investigation now, thanks to Pennywise," she finished, seeing Ben's white and stunned expression. "The Inquisitor could put Ben in prison. She could strip his Marks. I

thought it would be better..."

"If Ben were gone when she arrived," said Jim. "No wonder you've been so eager to send him away."

"Who is the Inquisitor?" Eddie demanded. The word conjured up images of the Spanish Inquisition, of torture, the whip and the rack. "What does she *do*?"

"She investigates Shadowhunters for the Clave," said Jim. "She ensures the Law hasn't been broken by Nephilim. She investigated all the Circle members after the Uprising."

"She cursed Keene?" Ben said. "She sent you here?"

"She chose our exile and his punishment. She has no love for us, and hates your father."

"I'm not leaving," said Ben, still very pale. "What will she do to you if she gets here and I'm gone? She'll think you conspired to hide me. She'll punish you—you and Bill and Richie and Georgie."

Sharon said nothing.

"Sharon, don't be a fool," Jim said. "She'll blame you more if you let Ben go. Keeping him here and allowing the trial by Sword would be a sign of good faith."

"Keeping Ben—you can't be serious, Jim!" Eddie said. He knew using the Sword had been his idea, but he was beginning to regret ever having brought it up. "She sounds awful."

"But if Ben leaves," said Jim, "he can never come back. He'll never be a Shadowhunter again. Like it or not, the Inquisitor is the Law's right hand. If Ben wants to stay a part of the Clave, he has to cooperate with her. He does have something on his side, something the members of the Circle did not have after the Uprising."

"And what's that?" Sharon asked.

Jim smiled faintly. "Unlike you," he said, "Ben is telling the truth."

Sharon took a hard breath, then turned to Ben. "Ultimately, it's your decision," she said. "If you want the trial, you can stay here until the Inquisitor comes."

"I'll stay," Ben said. There was a firmness in his tone, devoid of anger, that surprised Eddie. He seemed to be looking past Sharon, a light flickering in his eyes, as if of reflected fire. In that moment Eddie couldn't help but think that Ben looked very like his father.

Notes for the Chapter:

this has nothing to do with the chapter, but I've been recently listening "sweater weather" all over again, idk why. am i obsessed? lol

5. The Inquisitor

"Orange juice, molasses, eggs—weeks past their sell-by date, though—and something that looks kind of like lettuce."

"Lettuce?" Eddie peered over Beverly's shoulder into the fridge. "Oh. That's some mozzarella."

Beverly shuddered and kicked Jim's fridge door shut. "Order pizza?"

"I already did," said Jim, coming into the kitchen with the cordless phone in hand. "One large veggie pie, four Cokes. And I called the hospital," he added, hanging the phone up. "There's been no change with Sonia."

"Oh," Eddie said. He sat down at the wooden table in Jim's kitchen. Usually Jim was pretty neat, but at the moment the table was covered in unopened mail and stacks of dirty plates. Jim's green duffel hung across the back of a chair. Eddie knew he should be helping with the cleaning up, but lately he just hadn't had the energy. Jim's kitchen was small and a little dingy at the best of times—he wasn't much of a cook, as evidenced by the fact that the spice rack that hung over the old-fashioned gas stove was empty of spices. Instead, he used it to hold boxes of coffee and tea.

Stan, who was on the seat next to Eddie, asked in a low voice "Are you okay?"

"I'm all right." Eddie managed a smile. "I didn't expect my mom to wake up today, Stan. I have this feeling she's—waiting for something."

"Do you know what?"

"No. Just that something's missing." Eddie looked up at Jim, but he was involved in vigorously scrubbing the plates clean in the sink. "Or someone."

Stan looked quizzically at him, then shrugged.

"So it sounds like the scene at the Institute was pretty intense."

Beverly was seating next to Stan, a big green apple on her hand.

Eddie shuddered. "Sharon is scary."

"And Ben decided to stay there and deal with this Inquisitor person? He didn't want to leave?" Stan said.

"It's what he has to do if he ever wants to have a life as a Shadowhunter," said Jim. "And being that—one of the Nephilim—means everything to him. I knew other Shadowhunters like him, back in Derry. If you took that away from him—"

The familiar buzz of the doorbell sounded. Jim tossed the dishcloth onto the counter. "I'll be right back."

As soon as he was out of the kitchen, Stan said, "It's really weird thinking of Jim as someone who was once a Shadowhunter. Weirder than it is thinking of him as a werewolf."

"Really? Why?" Eddie asked.

Stan shrugged. "I've heard of werewolves before. They're sort of a known element. So he turns into a wolf once a month, so what. But the Shadowhunter thing—they're like a cult."

"They're not like a cult."

"Sure they are. Shadowhunting is their whole lives. And they look down on everyone else. They call us mundanes. Like they're not human beings. They're not friends with ordinary people, they don't go to the same places, they don't know the same jokes, they think they're above us." Stan pulled one gangly leg up and twisted the frayed edge of the hole in the knee of his jeans. "I met another werewolf today."

"Don't tell me you were hanging out with Freaky Pete at the Hunter's Moon." There was an uneasy feeling to Beverly's voice.

"No. It was a boy," Stan said. "About our age. Named Mike."

"Mike?" Beverly said, there was a confused tone to her voice, but also curiosity.

"I don't know, but he wanted to know if you had a boyfriend."

Beverly frowned. "Why?"

Stan shrugged. "How could I know?" He tapped his fingers against the table. "What does Eleven teach you, anyway? How to make pigs fly, or getting you an iPhone X?"

Beverly rolled her eyes. "I wish, but no. Turns out, magic is *a lot* more than just having wiggling your fingers and making things appearing."

"Pizza's here." Jim was back in the kitchen carrying a square white pizza box. He dropped it onto the table and Eddie reached over to pop it open. The smell of hot dough, tomato sauce, and cheese reminded him how starved he was. He tore off a slice, not waiting for Jim to slide a plate across the table to him. Jim sat down with a grin, shaking his head.

"Mike Hanlon is one of the pack, right?" Beverly asked, taking a slice herself.

Jim nodded. "Sure. He's a good kid. I've had him over here a few times looking out for the bookstore while I've been at the hospital. He lets me pay him in books."

Beverly looked at Jim over her pizza. "Are you low on money?"

Jim shrugged. "Money's never been important to me, and the pack looks after its own."

"It must have been weird for you," Eddie said to Jim. "Seeing Sharon Denbrough like that, after such a long time."

"Not precisely weird. Sharon isn't that different now from how she was then—in fact, she's more like herself than ever, if that makes sense."

Eddi thought it did. The way that Sharon Denbrough had looked recollected to him the slim dark girl in the photo Keene had given him, the one with the haughty tilt to her chin. "How do you think she feels about you?" he asked. "Do you really think they hoped you were dead?"

Jim smiled. "Maybe not out of hatred, no, but it would have been more convenient and less messy for them if I had died, certainly. That I'm not just alive but am leading the downtown pack can't be something they'd hoped for. It's their job, after all, to keep the peace between Downworlders—and here I come, with a history with them and plenty of reason to want revenge. They'll be worried I'm a wild card."

"Are you?" asked Stan. They were out of pizza, so he reached over without looking and took one of Beverly's nibbled crusts. He knew she hated crust. "A wild card, I mean."

"There's nothing wild about me. I'm stolid. Middle-aged."

"Except that once a month you turn into a wolf and go tearing around slaughtering things," Eddie said.

"It could be worse," Jim said. "Men my age have been known to purchase expensive sports cars and sleep with supermodels."

"You're only thirty-eight," Stan pointed out. "That's not middle-aged."

"Thank you, Stan, I appreciate that." Jim opened the pizza box and, finding it empty, shut it with a sigh. "Though you did eat all the pizza."

"I only had five slices," Stan protested, leaning his chair backward so it balanced precariously on its two back legs.

"How many slices did you think were in a pizza, dork?" Beverly hit him playfully on his forehead.

"Less than five slices isn't a meal. It's a snack." Stan looked apprehensively at Jim. "Does this mean you're going to wolf out and eat me?"

"Certainly not." Jim rose to toss the pizza box into the trash. "You would be stringy and hard to digest."

"But kosher," Stan pointed out cheerfully.

"I'll be sure to point any Jewish lycanthropes your way." Jim leaned

his back against the sink. "But to answer your earlier question, Eddie, it was strange seeing Sharon Denbrough, but not because of her. It was the surroundings. The Institute reminded me too much of the Hall of Accords in Derry—I could feel the strength of the Gray Book's runes all around me, after fifteen years of trying to forget them."

"Did you?" Eddie asked. "Manage to forget them?"

"There are some things you never forget. The runes of the Book are more than illustrations. They become part of you. Part of your skin. Being a Shadowhunter never leaves you. It's a gift that's carried in your blood, and you can no more change it than you can change your blood type."

"I was wondering," Eddie said, "if maybe I should get some Marks myself."

Stan dropped the pizza crust he'd been gnawing on. "You're kidding."

"No, I'm not. Why would I joke about something like that? And why *shouldn't* I get Marks? I'm a Shadowhunter. I might as well go for what protection I can get."

"Protection from what?" Stan demanded, leaning forward so that the front legs of his chair hit the floor with a bang. "I thought all this Shadowhunting stuff was over. I thought you were trying to live a normal life."

Beverly's tone was mild. "I'm not sure there's such a thing as a normal life."

Eddie looked down at his arm, where Richie had drawn the only Mark he'd ever received. He could still see the lacelike white tracery it had left behind, more a memory than a scar. "Sure, I want to get away from the weirdness. But what if the weirdness comes after me? What if I don't have a choice?

"Or maybe you don't want to get away from the weirdness that badly," Stan muttered. "Not as long as Richie is still involved with it, anyway."

Jim cleared his throat. "Most Nephilim go through levels of training

before they receive their Marks. I wouldn't recommend getting any until you've completed some instruction. And whether you even want to do that is up to you, of course. However, there is something you should have. Something every Shadowhunter should have."

"An obnoxious, arrogant attitude?" Stan said.

"A stele," said Jim. "Every Shadowhunter should have a stele."

"Do *you* have one?" Beverly asked, surprised.

Without responding, Jim headed out of the kitchen. He was back in a few moments, holding an object wrapped in black fabric. Setting the object down on the table, he unrolled the cloth, revealing a gleaming wandlike instrument, made of a pale, opaque crystal. A stele.

"Pretty," said Eddie.

"I'm glad you think so," said Jim, "because I want you to have it."

"Have it?" Eddie looked at him in astonishment. "But it's yours, isn't it?"

He shook his head. "This was your mother's. She didn't want to keep it at the apartment in case you happened across it, so she asked me to hold on to it for her."

Eddie picked the stele up. It felt cool to the touch, though he knew it would heat to a glow when used. It was a strange object, not quite long enough to be a weapon, not quite short enough to be an easily manipulated drawing tool. He supposed the odd size was just something you got used to over time. "I can have it?"

"Sure. It's an old model, of course, almost twenty years out of date. They may have refined the designs since. Still, it's reliable enough."

Stan watched him as Eddie held the stele like a conductor's baton, tracing invisible patterns lightly on the air between them. "This kind of reminds me of the time my grandfather gave me his old golf clubs."

Eddie laughed and lowered his hand. "Yeah, except you never used those."

"And I hope you never have to use *that*," Stan said, and looked quickly away before Eddie could reply.

Smoke rose from the Marks in black spirals and he smelled the choking scent of his own skin burning. His father stood over him with the stele, its tip gleaming red like the tip of a poker left too long in the fire. "Close your eyes, Jonathan," he said. "Pain is only what you allow it to be." But Ben's hand curled in on itself, unwillingly, as if his skin were writhing, twisting to get away from the stele. He heard the snap as one bone in his hand broke, and then another...

Ben opened his eyes and blinked up at the darkness, his father's voice fading away like smoke in rising wind. He tasted pain, metallic on his tongue. He'd bitten the inside of his lip. He sat up, wincing. The snap came again and involuntarily he glanced down at his hand. It was unmarked. He realized the sound was coming from outside the room. Someone knocking, albeit hesitantly, at the door. He rolled off the bed, shivering as his bare feet hit the cold floor. He'd fallen asleep in his clothes and he looked down at his wrinkled shirt in distaste. He probably still smelled like wolf. And he ached all over.

The knock came again. Ben strode across the room and threw the door open. He blinked in surprise. "Bill?"

Bill, hands in his jeans pockets, shrugged self-consciously. "Sorry it's so e-early. Mom s-sent me to get you. She wants to see you in the library."

"What time is it?"

"Five a.m."

"What the hell are you doing up?"

"I never went to b-bed." It looked like he was telling the truth. His blue eyes were surrounded by dark shadows.

Ben ran a hand through his tousled hair. "All right. Hang on a second while I change my shirt." Heading to the wardrobe, he rummaged through neatly folded square stacks until he found a dark blue long-

sleeved T-shirt. He peeled the shirt he was wearing off carefully—in some places it was stuck to his skin with dried blood.

Bill looked away. "W-what happened to you?" His voice was oddly constricted.

"Picked a fight with a pack of werewolves." Ben slid the blue shirt over his head. Dressed, he padded after Bill into the hallway. "What were you doing out all night, anyway?"

"I went walking in the p-park. Tried to clear my head."

"What did you need to clear your head about?"

"You. My parents," Bill said. "They c-came and explained why they were so angry after you left. And t-they explained about Keene. Thanks for not telling me that, by the way."

"Sorry." Ben flushed.. "I couldn't bring myself to do it, somehow."

"Well, it doesn't look g-good." Bill turned to look accusingly at Ben. "It looks like you were hiding things. Things about P-Pennywise."

Ben stopped in his tracks. "Do you think I was lying? About not knowing Pennywise was my father?"

"No!" Bill looked startled, either at the question or at Ben's vehemence in asking it. "And I don't care who your f-father is either. It doesn't m-matter to me. You're still the same person."

"Whoever that is." The words came out cold, before he could stop them.

"I'm just saying." Bill's tone was placating. "You can be a little—harsh sometimes. Just think b-before you talk, that's all I'm asking. No one's y-your enemy here, Ben."

"Well, thanks for the advice," Ben said. "I can walk myself the rest of the way to the library."

"Ben—"

But Ben was already gone, leaving Bill's distress behind. Ben hated it when other people were worried on his behalf. It made him feel like maybe there really was something to worry about.

The library door was half open. Not bothering to knock, Ben went in. It had always been one of his favorite rooms in the Institute—there was something comforting about its old-fashioned mix of wood and brass fittings, the leather- and velvet-bound books ranged along the walls like old friends waiting for him to return. Now a blast of cold air hit him the moment the door swung open. The fire that usually blazed in the huge fireplace all through the fall and winter was a heap of ashes. The lamps had been switched off. The only light came through the narrow louvered windows and the tower's skylight, high above.

Not wanting to, Ben thought of Keene. If he were here, the fire would be lit, the gas lamps turned up, casting shaded pools of golden light onto the parquet floor. Keene himself would be slouched in an armchair by the fire, Gard on one shoulder, a book propped at his side—

But there *was* someone in Keene's old armchair. A thin, gray someone, who rose from the armchair, fluidly uncoiling like a snake charmer's cobra, and turned toward him with a cool smile.

It was a woman. She wore a long, old-fashioned dark gray cloak that fell to the tops of her boots. Beneath it was a fitted slate-colored suit with a mandarin collar, the stiff points of which pressed into her neck. Her hair was a sort of colorless brown, pulled tightly back with combs, and her eyes were flinty gray chips. Ben could feel them, like the touch of freezing water, as her gaze traveled from his filthy, mud-splattered jeans, to his bruised face, to his eyes, and locked there.

For a second something hot flickered in her gaze, like the glow of a flame trapped under ice. Then it vanished. "You are the boy?"

Before Ben could reply, another voice answered: It was Sharon, having come into the library behind him. He wondered why he hadn't heard her approaching and realized she had abandoned her heels for slippers. She wore a long robe of patterned silk and a thin-lipped expression. "Yes, Inquisitor," she said. "This is Jonathan Gray."

The Inquisitor moved toward Ben like drifting gray smoke. She stopped in front of him and held out a hand—long-fingered and white, it reminded him of an albino spider. "Look at me, boy," she said, and suddenly those long fingers were under his chin, forcing his head up. She was incredibly strong. "You will call me Inquisitor. You will not call me anything else." The skin around her eyes was mazed with fine lines like cracks in paint. Two narrow grooves ran from the edges of her mouth to her chin. "Do you understand?"

For most of his life the Inquisitor had been a distant half-mythical figure to Ben. Her identity, even many of her duties, were shrouded in the secrecy of the Clave. He had always imagined she would be like the Silent Brothers, with their self-contained power and hidden mysteries. He had not imagined someone so direct—or so hostile. Her eyes seemed to cut at him, to slice away his armor of confidence and amusement, stripping him down to the bone. "My name is Ben," he said. "Not boy. Ben Hanscom."

"You have no right to the name of Hanscom," she said. "You are a Gray. To claim the name of Hanscom makes you a liar. Just like your father."

"Actually," said Ben. "I prefer to think that I'm a liar in a way that's uniquely my own."

"I see." A small smile curved her pale mouth. It was not a nice smile. "You are intolerant of authority, just as your father was. Like the angel whose name you both bear." Her fingers gripped his chin with a sudden ferocity, her nails digging in painfully. "Lucifer was rewarded for his rebellion when God cast him into the pits of hell." Her breath was sour as vinegar. "If you defy my authority, I can promise that you will envy him his fate."

She released Ben and stepped back. He could feel the slow trickle of blood where her nails had cut his face. His hands shook with anger, but he refused to raise one to wipe the blood away.

"Joyce—," began Sharon, then corrected herself. "Inquisitor Byers. He's agreed to a trial by the Sword. You can find out whether he's telling the truth."

"About his father? Yes. I know I can." Inquisitor Byers' stiff collar dug into her throat as she turned to look at Sharon. "You know, Sharon, the Clave is not pleased with you. You and Zack are the guardians of the Institute. You're just lucky your record over the years has been relatively clean. Few demonic disturbances until recently, and everything's been quiet the past few days. No reports, even from Derry, so the Clave is feeling lenient. We have sometimes wondered if you'd actually rescinded your allegiance to Pennywise. As it is, he set a trap for you and you fell right into it. One might think you'd know better."

"There was no trap," Ben cut in. "My father knew the Denbroughs would raise me if they thought I was Daniel Hanscom's son. That's all."

The Inquisitor stared at him as if he were a talking cockroach. "Do you know about the cuckoo bird, Benjamin Gray?"

Ben wondered if perhaps being the Inquisitor—it couldn't be a pleasant job—had left Joyce Byers a little unhinged. "The what?"

"The cuckoo bird," she said. "You see, cuckoos are parasites. They lay their eggs in other birds' nests. When the egg hatches, the baby cuckoo pushes the other baby birds out of the nest. The poor parent birds work themselves to death trying to find enough food to feed the enormous cuckoo child who has murdered their babies and taken their places."

"Enormous?" said Ben. "Did you just call me fat?"

"It was an analogy."

"I am not fat."

"And I," said Sharon, "don't want your pity, Joyce. I refuse to believe the Clave will punish either myself or my husband for choosing to bring up the son of a dead friend." She squared her shoulders. "It isn't as if we didn't tell them what we were doing."

"And I've never harmed any of the Denbroughs in any way," said Ben. "I've worked hard, and trained hard—say whatever you want about

my father, but he made a Shadowhunter out of me. I've earned my place here."

"Don't defend your father to me," the Inquisitor said. "I knew him. He was—*is*—the vilest of men."

"Vile? Who says 'vile'? What does that even mean?"

The Inquisitor's colorless lashes grazed her cheeks as she narrowed her eyes, her gaze speculative. "Did your father teach you to behave this way?" she said at last. "The Denbroughs have coddled you and let your worst qualities run rampant. You may look like an angel, Benjamin Gray, but I know exactly what you are."

"He's just a boy," said Sharon. *Was she defending him?* Ben looked at her quickly, but her eyes were averted. "Bob was just a boy once. Now before we do any digging around in that blond head of yours to find out the truth, I suggest you cool your temper. And I know just where you can do that best."

Ben blinked. "Are you sending me to my room?"

"I'm sending you to the prisons of the Silent City. After a night there I suspect you'll be a great deal more cooperative."

Sharon gasped. "Joyce—you can't!"

"I certainly can." Her eyes gleamed like razors. "Do you have anything to say to me, *Jonathan?*"

Ben could only stare. There were levels and levels to the Silent City, and he had seen only the first two, where the archives were kept and where the Brothers sat in council. The prison cells were at the very lowest level of the City, beneath the graveyard levels where thousands of buried Shadowhunter dead rested in silence. The cells were reserved for the worst of criminals: vampires gone rogue, warlocks who broke the Covenant Law, Shadowhunters who spilled each other's blood. Ben was none of those things. How could she even suggest sending him there?

"Very wise, Jonathan. I see you're already learning the best lesson the Silent City has to teach you." The Inquisitor's smile was like a

grinning skull's. "How to keep your mouth shut."

Notes for the Chapter:

Joyce is a cold b*tch lmao, this cracks me up considering how she is in ST lol

6. Darkness

Eddie was in the middle of helping Jim clean up the remains of dinner when the doorbell rang again. He straightened up, his gaze flicking to Jim. "Expecting someone?"

Jim frowned, drying his hands on the dish towel. "No. Wait here." Eddie saw him reach up to grab something off one of the shelves as he left the kitchen. Something that glinted.

"Did you see that knife?" Stan whistled, standing up from the table. "Is he expecting trouble?"

"I think he's always expecting trouble," Eddie said, "these days." He peered around the side of the kitchen door, saw Jim at the open front door. Eddie could hear his voice, but not what he was saying. He didn't sound upset, though.

Stan's hand on his shoulder pulled him back. "Keep away from the door. What are you, crazy? What if there's some demon thing out there?"

"Then it'll see your face and will run away immediately." Beverly closed the door of the bathroom behind her and giggled.

Stan rolled his eyes. "Remind me again why we invited her." He said to Eddie.

"Eddie!" Jim called him from the front room. "Come here. I want you to meet someone."

Eddie patted Stan's hand and set it aside. "Be right back."

Jim was leaning against the door frame, arms crossed. The knife in his hand had magically disappeared. A boy stood on the front steps of the house, a boy with light brown skin in a brown corduroy jacket. "This is Mike," Jim said. "Who I was just telling you about."

The boy looked at Eddie. His eyes under the bright porch light were a strange amber green. "You must be Eddie."

Eddie nodded awkwardly.

"So that kid—Ben, who tore up the Hunter's Moon—he's your brother?"

"Yeah," Eddie said shortly, not liking the boy's intrusive curiosity.

"Mike?" It was Beverly coming up behind Eddie. "Hey, there."

The boy's eyes widened in surprise. "Oh, Beverly! It's so nice to see you."

"Hey, Mike." Stan was behind Beverly, hands thrust into the pockets of his jean jacket.

"Oh, you're Stan, right? I suck at names, but I remember you." The boy smiled at him.

"Great," said Eddie. "Now we're all friends."

Jim coughed and straightened up. "I wanted you to meet each other because Mike's going to be working around the bookshop for the next few weeks," he said. "If you see him going in and out, don't worry about it. He's got a key."

"And I'll keep an eye out for anything weird," Mike promised. "Demons, vamps, whatever."

"Thanks," said Eddie. "I feel so safe now."

Mike blinked. "Are you being sarcastic?"

"We're all a little tense," Beverly said. "I for one am happy to know someone will be around here keeping an eye on my boy Eddie."

Eddie sighed. "She's right. Sorry I snapped at you."

"It's all right." Mike looked sympathetic. "I heard about your mom. I'm sorry."

"Me too," Eddie said, turned around, and went back to the kitchen. He sat down at the table and put his face in his hands. A moment

later Jim followed him.

"Sorry," Jim said. "I guess you weren't in the mood to meet anyone."

Eddie looked at him through splayed fingers, he could hear their voices, soft as murmurs, from the other end of the house.

"I just thought it would be good for you to have a friend right now."

"I have Stan and Beverly."

Eddie heard the door shut at the other end of the house, and a pair of footsteps approaching the kitchen. The smell of cold night air came in with them.

"I'm going home," Stan said. "If I make it quick, my mom won't notice that I left."

"Sure." Eddie went and hugged his friend, realizing that he didn't smell like detergent anymore, it was weird. But Eddie decided not to make anything out of it. "See you tomorrow?"

"Sure," Stan nodded, he hugged Beverly and said goodbye to Jim, before leaving the house, Eddie heard him running to get fast to his home.

"Would it be okay if I crashed here tonight?" Beverly asked. "It feels weird being at my house alone."

"You know you're always welcome." Jim glanced at his watch. "I'm going to get some sleep. Have to be up at five a.m. to get to the hospital by six."

"Why six?" Beverly asked, after Jim had left the kitchen.

"That's when hospital visiting hours start," Eddie said. "You don't have to sleep on the couch. Not if you don't want to. There's a double bed in the guest room."

Beverly seemed to think for a moment. "You want to do a sleepover?"

"If you want to say it like that, then yes."

Beverly gave him a shiny smile. "Of course! Look what I've got..." She dug into her green backpack and pulled out two bags of gummy bears. "Hamibo are your favorites, right?"

"Oh my God! A gummy bear party!" Eddie almost wanted to slap himself for sounding like a five year old, but didn't. "Should I call Stan, then?"

Beverly had already opened a bag, pulling out three red bears. "Nah, I already had a gummy bear party with him, now it's our turn."

"Well, that was quick." Beverly said, grabbing the bags and throwing them across the room. It was twenty minutes later, and they both had already eaten all the gummy bears, they were lying on the bed, Eddie at Beverly's feet and vice versa. This position reminded Eddie of all the nights he and Beverly had spent in his house, it brought so many happy memories of them together that Eddie couldn't stop thinking how awful their lives had become.

"You okay?" Beverly was touching Eddie's arm. Eddie blinked, realizing that she was talking to him.

"I'm tired, of everything."

Beverly sighed. "Oh no, I sense a pep talk coming."

Eddie snickered and seated on the bed to face Beverly. "I'm so sorry I brought you into this mess, I didn't mean for things to go this way."

Beverly swallowed the last gummy bear she had in her mouth. "What...are you talking about?"

"You, you shouldn't be here, neither does Stan. I spent this past few weeks worrying about my problems, I didn't realize I brought the two of you with them."

"Are you serious? Eddie, it's not your fault that your mom was kidnapped by a demon-killer psychopath."

Eddie played with the nails of his right hand. "I try to tell myself that,

but everytime I say or do something, everything falls apart. I keep wrecking things."

"So do I." Beverly looked down at Eddie's hands. "But if I'm being honest, I don't want things to go back to the way they were, we were living a lie." She looked away, as if she were in a totally different place. "Everytime I go home, I can't even look at my parents, they keep acting like everything is fine...and it's fine for them, but I know the truth. We just got to accept it."

Eddie sighed. "You're right, I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Nothing is wrong with you, you just have to let the past go."

Eddie gave Beverly a sad smile. "Thanks Bev, I'm enjoying our together time."

Beverly chuckled. "Remember that day in 10th grade when we snuck into my mom's liquor cabinet?"

Eddie puts his hands on his face, laughing. "Oh God. Oh, it was my first wicked hangover." He shook his head. "I'm never forgetting Stan's speech about world prosperity, and when he went to Mrs. Lopez house to kiss her dog."

They both started to laugh harder, as if they were kids again. Eddie couldn't stop but think that this very moment was something special, like they both had something to pull out of their chests and laugh about it.

"It's ridiculous," Beverly said, rubbing her stomach. "How crazy our lives have gotten in the last few weeks."

"Yeah," Eddie said softly, not knowing how to respond to that.

"You kill demons now," She said. "And I am a redheaded and more cooler version of Harry Potter."

"Please, do not say that again."

Beverly chuckled. "Sorry, I'm just saying—"

"I kissed Richie." Eddie blurted out before he could stop himself.

"Yeah," Beverly sounded confused. "I *know*, you told me. You kissed that night on your birthday—"

"No, three days ago, after the encounter with Pennywise."

Beverly was speechless. "Really?"

Eddie nodded, feeling like he could finally breathe again.

"Well," Beverly pursed her lips. "Was it *good*?"

Eddie wheezed. "Doesn't matter."

"That means it was."

The darkness of the prison of the Silent City was more profound than any darkness Ben had ever known. He couldn't see the shape of his own hand in front of his eyes, couldn't see the floor or ceiling of his cell. What he knew of the cell, he knew from the torchlit first glimpse he'd had, guided down here by a contingent of Silent Brothers, who had opened the barred gate of the cell for him and ushered him inside as if he were a common criminal.

Then again, that's probably exactly what they thought he was.

He knew that the cell had a flagged stone floor, that three of the walls were hewn rock, and that the fourth was made of narrowly spaced electrum bars, each end sunk deeply into stone. He knew there was a door set into those bars. He also knew that a long metal bar ran along the east wall, because the Silent Brothers had attached one loop of a pair of silver cuffs to this bar, and the other cuff to his wrist. He could walk up and down the cell a few steps, rattling like Marley's ghost, but that was as far as he could go. He had already rubbed his right wrist raw yanking thoughtlessly at the cuff. At least he was left-handed—a small bright spot in the impenetrable blackness. Not that it mattered much, but it was reassuring to have his better fighting hand free.

He began another slow promenade along the length of his cell, trailing his fingers along the wall as he walked. It was unnerving not to know what time it was. In Derry, his father had taught him to tell time by the angle of the sun, the length of afternoon shadows, the position of the stars in the night sky. But there were no stars here. In fact, he had begun to wonder if he would ever see the sky again.

Ben paused. Now, why had he wondered that? Of course he'd see the sky again. The Clave weren't going to kill him. The penalty of death was reserved for murderers. But the flutter of fear stayed with him, just under his rib cage, strange as an unexpected twinge of pain.

He thought of Sharon saying, *You were never afraid of the dark.*

It was true. This anxiety was unnatural, not like him at all. There had to be more to it than simple darkness. He took another shallow breath. He just had to get through the night. One night. That was it. He took another step forward, his manacle jingling drearily.

A sound split the air, freezing him in his tracks. It was a high, howling ululation, a sound of pure and mindless terror. It seemed to go on and on like a singing note plucked from a violin, growing higher and thinner and sharper until it was abruptly cut off.

Ben swore. His ears were ringing, and he could taste terror in his mouth, like bitter metal. Who would have thought that fear had a taste? He pressed his back against the wall of the cell, willing himself to calm down.

He took a deep breath, filling his lungs, just as another scream sounded, this one very loud. The breath rasped out of his chest as something crashed loudly, very close to him, and he saw a sudden bloom of light, a hot fire-flower stabbing into his eyes.

Brother Murray staggered into view, his right hand clutching a still-burning torch, his parchment hood fallen back to reveal a face torqued into a grotesque expression of terror. His previously sewn-shut mouth gaped open in a soundless scream, the gory threads of torn stitches dangling from his shredded lips. Blood, black in the torchlight, spattered his light robes. He took a few staggering steps forward, his hands outstretched—and then, as Ben watched in utter

disbelief, Murray pitched forward and fell headlong to the floor. Ben heard the shatter of bones as the archivist's body struck the ground and the torch sputtered, rolling out of Murray's hand and toward the shallow stone gutter cut into the floor just outside the barred cell.

Ben went to his knees instantly, stretching as far as the chain would let him, his fingers reaching for the torch. He couldn't quite touch it. The light was fading rapidly, but by its waning glow he could see Murray's dead face turned toward him, blood still leaking from his open mouth. His teeth were gnarled black stubs.

Ben's chest felt as if something heavy were pressed against it. The Silent Brothers never opened their mouths, never spoke or laughed or screamed. But that had been the sound Ben had heard, he was sure of it now—the screams of men who hadn't cried out in half a century, the sound of a terror more profound and powerful than the ancient Rune of Silence. But how could that be? And where were the other Brothers?

Ben wanted to scream for help, but the weight was still on his chest, pressing down. He couldn't seem to get enough air. He lunged for the torch again and felt one of the small bones in his wrist shatter. Pain shot up his arm, but it gave him the extra inch he needed. He swept the torch into his hand and rose to his feet. As the flame leaped back into life, he heard another noise. A thick noise, a sort of ugly, dragging slither. The hair on the back of his neck stood up, sharp as needles. He thrust the torch forward, his shaking hand sending wild flicks of light dancing across the walls, brilliantly illuminating the shadows.

For a moment, bright as daylight, he saw the whole room: the cell, the barred door, the bare flagstones beyond, and the dead body of Murray huddled against the floor. There was a door just behind Murray. It was opening slowly. Something heaved its way through the door. Something huge and dark and formless. Eyes like burning ice, sunk deep into dark folds, regarded Ben with a snarling amusement. Then the thing lunged forward. A great cloud of roiling vapor rose up in front of Ben's eyes like a wave sweeping across the surface of the ocean. The last thing he saw was the flame of his torch guttering green and blue before it was swallowed up by the darkness.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm still obsessed with , "sweater weather" what's wrong with me???? XD

7. Sins of the Fathers

Notes for the Chapter:

I've never been to Central Park, sorry if I get something wrong. I'm using Google Maps lmao

The route back home wasn't a short one, so Stan had to stop running for a second or else his heart would literally get out of his chest. Lately, he had been feeling sick, everytime he tried to walk, he would feel as if he was running for miles.

To get to his house, Stan had to cross Central Park and a nice Mexican Restaurant in the 11th Street. So it was an okay route, it would take him twenty minutes to get to his house.

But as he was passing by the big sign showing Central Park's map, Stan couldn't help himself and just go in there.

Not many people were there, he could only see a pair of kids running around playing with a ball, a couple patting a dog on the head, sitting on a bench, an old woman trying to read the map. What Stan loved most about the park, was that, at some point at night, it would be quiet. And that's all he needed at that moment, quietness.

After a few minutes of wandering around in circles, he decided that it was time to go home. He pulled out his phone and looked at the clock. 11:23.

Well, if he went to his home now, his mom would certainly kill him.

As he passed the pond, something caught his attention. Something—someone— was leaning against the metal bars surrounding the pond, looking at the water. They looked familiar to Stan, as if he was watching someone he knew for a very long time. As he got closer, he immediately realized who it was. Bill.

"Frowning too much gives you wrinkles, you know?"

Bill quickly got out of his trance and stared at Stan, as if he was seeing a stranger. Slowly, Bill seemed to recognized him and

sighed. "My God. What are y-you doing here?" He said slightly annoyed.

"This is a public park. What are *you* doing here?" Stan said, crossing his arms. "Shouldn't you be hunting down demons?"

"Not everyday." Bill straightened up and stared at Stan. "And that's n-not any of your business."

"Are you always this charming? You must be a hit with the ladies."

Bill shook his head annoyingly and started to walk away. Stan immediately grabbed his arm. "Wait!"

Bill got free of Stan's grasp and frowned again. "What?"

"I'm sorry, I just..." Stan sighed. "Forget it, go. I won't bother you."

"Okay." Bill started to walk. Stan breathed slowly, getting his feet to move to go along with Bill.

"Psychological studies say that talking to a nice friend can solve problems." Stan watched in curiosity at Bill. "Did you know that?"

"Too b-bad you're not my friend."

"Even better!" Stan exclaimed. "Trusting to almost strangers is good too."

"I'm n-not going to—"

"Look, I'm bored. Okay? I need a distraction and right now you seem like the best option. You owe me, after I saved you from that demon."

Bill looked taken aback, trying to find the words to say, then he exhaled slowly. "Fine."

Stan couldn't be more surprised. "Oh, really?"

"Don't make m-me say it twice."

"Okay," Stan sounded proud of himself. "So, what happened? Is it The Inquisitor?"

Bill stopped on his tracks and didn't even look at him. "Eddie told you?"

"Well, yeah, we're best friends." Stan simply said. "And besides, my life is more interesting now that I know everything."

"You d-don't even know half of what's going on." Bill sounded bemused. "The Inquisitor put Ben on a prison."

"What? Why?"

"Who knows, my m-mom wouldn't tell me." Bill looked at Stan now. "Don't tell Eddie."

"Why not? He's his brother, he should—"

"No." Bill said, Stan stopped talking. "If you t-tell him, Eddie would just come here and m-make things worse."

"Wouldn't you, though?" Stan asked curiously. "Wouldn't you try to save your brothers if they were in danger?"

"Of course I would." Bill said. "But this is d-different."

"I get it. Your Shadowhunter stuff and everything."

"*Pulvis et umbra sumus.*" Bill said, without stuttering, Stan realized.

"Huh?" Stan didn't know what the hell did he just say.

Bill sighed disapprovingly. "*We are dust and shadows.*" He sounded sad. "It's n-not a long life, killing demons, you k-know?; one tends to die young, and then they b-burn your body—dust to dust, in the literal sense. And then w-we vanish into the shadows of history."

Stan, for the first time, couldn't find the words to answer that. "I..."

"That's why I c-came here," Bill continued. "It just came to my m-mind, I guess."

"Well," Stan shrugged. "Mundanes aren't so different either. We live our lives trying to be happy, and no matter what we do, at some

point it's all gonna end. That's just life." Then he giggled. "Sorry, I got too much into character." He meant to speak lightly, but at the look on Bill's face, his voice trailed off into uncertainty. He was looking at Stan with an odd steadiness; his eyes, Stan realized, were dark blue, like the ocean. Or whatever is dark blue these days. His gaze passed over Stan's face, down his throat, to his wrinkled red T-shirt, before rising back up to his face, where it lingered on his mouth. Stan's heart was pounding as if he had been running up stairs. Something in his chest ached, as if he were hungry or thirsty. There was something he wanted, but he didn't know what—

"It's late," Bill said abruptly, looking away from Stan. "I s-should go."

"I—" Stan wanted to protest, but there was no reason to do so. He was right. It *was* late, the few people who were at the park minutes ago, weren't anymore. The only sounds Stan could hear were a few dogs barking in the distance and the leaves being dragged across the ground. "Yeah, you're right. See? Our conversation wasn't so bad—"

But when Stan looked at where Bill should have been standing and saw an empty space, he stopped talking. He could see Bill walking away, hands in his pockets as if he were trying to run away.

This time, Stan didn't stop him.

"Why haven't you told him?"

Eddie opened his eyes immediately, looking at his left to see Beverly. "Tell *who* what?"

"Stan. You haven't told him about the kiss. The new one."

"I don't know. I was afraid of his reaction to it." Eddie closed his eyes again, only hearing the sound of his and Beverly's breathing. "And it doesn't matter, it's not going to happen again."

"That's bullshit, and we both know it." Beverly was shaking her head, even though Eddie couldn't see it, he could feel it. "There has to be a reason why you kissed Richie."

Eddie didn't know what to say, or maybe he knew, but was too scared

of saying it out loud. "I was just caught up in the moment. You know, I found mom, Jim, my brother—"

"That's also bullshit. You have to talk to Richie at some point, I'm pretty sure he liked it."

"How could you know?"

"Because I see his face when you're with him, that guy has fallen for you."

Eddie immediately gathered up his pajamas from the closet and headed into the bathroom.

"Avoiding the conversation, I see." Beverly said.

Pulling the door closed, he made a face at her. "I'll be right back."

Whatever she said in response was lost as he shut the door. He brushed his teeth and then ran the water in the sink for a long time, staring at himself in the medicine cabinet mirror. What was going on with him? Why did the mention of Richie's name brought up so many emotions?

Kissing Richie had been like opening up a vein of something unknown inside his body, something hotter and sweeter and bitterer than blood. *Don't think about Richie*, Eddie told himself fiercely, but looking at himself in the mirror, he saw his eyes darken and knew his body remembered even if his mind didn't want to.

He ran the water cold and splashed it over his face before reaching for his pajamas. They were the same he used the night of his birthday, the night he kissed Richie for the first time.

He went back into he bedroom only to discover that Beverly was asleep in the center of the bed, clutching the bolster pillow as if it were a human being. He stifled a laugh.

"Bev...", he whispered—then he heard the sharp two-tone beep that signaled that a text message had just arrived on his cell phone. The phone itself was lying folded on the bedside table; Eddie picked it up and saw that the message was from Richie.

Eddie gulped, hard. Considering not to see what it was, but he took a deep breath and scrolled hastily down to the text. He read it twice, just to make sure he wasn't imagining things. Then he ran to the closet to get his jacket.

"Ben."

The voice spoke out of the blackness: slow, dark, familiar as pain. Ben blinked his eyes open and saw only darkness. He shivered. He was lying curled on the icy flagstone floor. He must have fainted. He felt a stab of fury at his own weakness, his own frailty.

He rolled onto his side, his torn wrist throbbing in its manacle. "Is anyone there?"

"Surely you recognize your own father, Ben." The voice came again, and Ben did know it: its sound of old iron, its smooth near-tonelessness. He tried to scramble to his feet but his boots slipped on a puddle of something and he skidded backward, his shoulders hitting the stone wall hard. His chain rattled like a chorus of steel wind chimes.

"Are you hurt?" A light blazed upward, searing Ben's eyes. He blinked away burning tears and saw Pennywise standing on the other side of the bars, beside the corpse of Brother Murray. A glowing witchlight stone in one hand cast a sharp whitish glow over the room. Ben could see the stains of old blood on the walls—and newer blood, a small lake of it, which had spilled from Murray's open mouth. He felt his stomach roil and clench, and thought of the black formless shape he'd seen before with eyes like burning jewels.

"That thing," he choked out. "Where is it? What was it?"

"You *are* hurt." Pennywise moved closer to the bars. "Who ordered you locked up here? Was it the Clave? The Denbroughs?"

"It was the Inquisitor." Ben looked down at himself. There was more blood on his pants legs and on his shirt. He couldn't tell if any of it was his. Blood was seeping slowly from beneath his manacle.

Pennywise regarded him thoughtfully through the bars. It was the first time in years Ben had seen his father in real battle dress—the thick leather Shadowhunter clothes that allowed freedom of movement while protecting the skin from most kinds of demon venom; the electrum-plated braces on his arms and legs, each marked with a series of glyphs and runes. There was a wide strap across his chest and the hilt of a sword gleamed above his shoulder. He squatted down then, putting his cool black eyes on a level with Ben's. Ben was surprised to see no anger in them. "The Inquisitor and the Clave are one and the same. And the Denbroughs should never have allowed this to happen. I would never have let anyone do this to you."

"Did you come down here to kill me?"

"Kill you? Why would I want to kill you?"

"Well, why did you kill Murray? And don't bother feeding me some story about how you just happened to wander along after he spontaneously died. I know you did this."

For the first time Pennywise glanced down at the body of Brother Murray. "I did kill him, and the rest of the Silent Brothers as well. I had to. They had something I needed."

"What? A sense of decency?"

"This," said Pennywise, and drew the Sword from his shoulder sheath in one swift movement. "Maellartach."

Ben choked back the gasp of surprise that rose in his throat. He recognized it well enough: The huge, heavy-bladed silver Sword with the hilt in the shape of outspread wings was the one that hung above the Speaking Stars in the Silent Brothers' council room. "You *took* the Silent Brothers' sword?"

"It was never theirs," Pennywise said. "It belongs to all Nephilim. This is the blade with which the Angel drove Adam and Eve out of the garden. And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way," he quoted, gazing down at the blade.

Ben licked his dry lips. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll tell you that," said Pennywise, "when I think I can trust you, and I know that you trust me."

"Trust you? After the way you sneaked through the Portal at Renwick's and smashed it so I couldn't come after you? And the way you tried to kill Eddie or Sonia?"

"I would never have hurt them," said Pennywise with a flash of anger. "Any more than I would hurt you."

"All you've ever done is hurt me! It was the Denbroughs who protected me!"

"I'm not the one who locked you up here. I'm not the one who threatens and distrusts you. That's the Denbroughs and their friends in the Clave."

Pennywise paused. "Seeing you like this—how they've treated you, and yet you remain stoic—I'm proud of you."

"What?"

"I realize now what I did wrong at Renwick's," Pennywise went on. "I was picturing you as the little boy I left behind in Derry, obedient to my every wish. Instead I found a headstrong young man, independent and courageous, yet I treated you as if you were still a child. No wonder you rebelled against me."

"Rebelled? I—" Ben's throat tightened, cutting off the words he wanted to say. His heart had begun pounding in rhythm with the throbbing in his hand.

"Now you are old enough to be told the truth."

"So tell me the truth."

Pennywise reached through the bars of the cell and laid his hand on top of Ben's. The rough, callused texture of his fingers felt exactly the way it had when Ben had been ten years old. "I want to trust you, Ben" he said. "Can I?"

Ben wanted to reply, but the words wouldn't come. His chest felt as if an iron band was being slowly tightened around it, cutting off his breath by inches. "I wish..." he whispered.

A noise sounded above them. A noise like the clang of a metal door; then Ben heard footsteps, whispers echoing off the City's stone walls. Pennywise started to his feet, closing his hand over the witchlight until it was only a dim glow and he himself was a faintly outlined shadow. "Quicker than I thought," he murmured, and looked down at Ben through the bars.

Ben looked past him, but he could see nothing but blackness beyond the faint illumination of the witchlight. He thought of the roiling dark form he had seen before, crushing out all light before it. "What's coming? What is it?" he demanded, scrabbling forward on his knees.

"I must go," said Pennywise. "But we're not done, you and I."

Ben put his hand to the bars. "Unchain me. Whatever it is, I want to be able to fight it."

"Unchaining you would hardly be a kindness now." Pennywise closed his hand around the witchlight stone completely. It winked out, plunging the room into darkness. Ben flung himself against the bars of the cell, his broken hand screaming its protest and pain.

"No!" he shouted. "Father, please."

"When you want to find me," Pennywise said, "you will find me." And then there was only the sound of his footsteps rapidly receding and Ben's own ragged breathing as he slumped against the bars.

8. City of Ashes

On the subway ride uptown, Eddie found himself unable to sit down. He paced up and down the near-empty train car, his headphones dangling around his neck. Richie hadn't picked up the phone when Eddie had called him, and an irrational sense of worry gnawed at Eddie's insides.

He charged up the stairs at the Ninety-sixth Street subway stop, only slowing to a walk as he approached the corner where the Institute hulked like a huge gray shadow. It had been hot down in the tunnels, and the sweat on the back of his neck was prickling coldly as he made his way up the cracked concrete walk to the Institute's front door.

He reached for the enormous iron bellpull that hung from the architrave, then hesitated. He was a Shadowhunter, wasn't he? He had a right to be in the Institute, just as much as the Denbroughs did. With a surge of resolve, he seized the door handle, trying to remember the words Ben had spoken. "In the name of the Angel, I—"

The door swung open onto a darkness starred by the flames of dozens of tiny candles. As he hurried between the pews, the candles flickered as if they were laughing at him. He reached the elevator and clanged the metal door shut behind him, stabbing at the buttons with a shaking finger. He willed his nervousness to subside—was he worried about Ben, he wondered, or worried about seeing Richie? Eddie's face, framed by the upturned collar of her jacket, looked very white and small, his eyes big and dark, his lips pale and bitten. Not pretty at all, he thought in dismay, and forced the thought back. What did it matter how he looked?

The elevator came to a clanging stop and Eddie pushed the door open. Mews was waiting for him in the foyer. He greeted Eddie with a disgruntled meow.

"What's wrong, Mews?" His voice sounded unnaturally loud in the quiet room. He wondered if anyone were here in the Institute. Maybe it was just him. The thought gave him the creeps. "Is anyone home?"

The orange cat turned his back and headed down the corridor. They passed the music room and the library, both empty, before Mews turned another corner and sat down in front of a closed door. *Right, then. Here we are*, his expression seemed to say.

Before Eddie could knock, the door opened, revealing Richie standing on the threshold, barefoot in a pair of jeans and a green sweater.

Eddie wasn't sure if he was breathing anymore, he pictured a million scenarios of seeing Richie again, and now he didn't know what to say.

Eddie could tell Richie was feeling the same thing. "Eddie, what are you doing here?" Richie said after a few seconds of silence.

Eddie swallowed and stared at him. "You sent me that text message. You said the Inquisitor threw Ben in *jail*."!

"Eddie!" Richie glanced up and down the corridor, then a little smile formed on his lips. "I didn't mean you should race down here right now."

Eddie was horrified. "Richie! Jail!"

"Yes, but—" With a defeated sigh, Richie stood aside, gesturing for Eddie to enter his room. "Look, come in. And shoo, you," he said, waving a hand at Mews. "Go guard the elevator."

Mews gave him a horrified look, lay down on his stomach, and went to sleep.

"Cats," Richie muttered, and slammed the door.

"Eddie?." Bill was sitting on Richie's unmade bed, his booted feet dangling over the side. "W-what are you doing here?"

Eddie sat down on the padded stool in front of Richie's night table. "Richie texted me. He told me what happened to Ben."

Richie and Bill exchanged a meaningful look. "Oh, come on, Bill," Richie said. "I thought he should know. I didn't know he'd come racing up here!"

Eddie's stomach lurched. "Of course I came! Why on earth did the Inquisitor throw him in prison?"

"It's not p-prison exactly. He's in the Silent City," said Bill, sitting up straight and pulling one of Richie's pillows across his lap. He picked idly at the beaded fringe sewed to its edges.

"In the Silent City? Why?"

Bill hesitated. "T-there are cells under the Silent City. They k-keep criminals there sometimes before deporting them to Derry to stand t-trial before the Council. People who've done really bad things. Murderers, renegade vampires, Shadowhunters who b-break the Accords. That's where Ben is now."

"Locked up with a bunch of murderers?" Eddie was on his feet, outraged. "What's wrong with you people? Why aren't you more upset?"

Bill and Richie exchanged another look. "It's just for a night," Richie said. "And there isn't anyone else down there with him. We asked."

"But why? What did Ben *do*?"

"He mouthed off to the Inquisitor. That was it, as far as I know," said Richie. "Even *I* wouldn't done it."

Bill muttered under his breath. "It's unbelievable."

"Then the Inquisitor must be insane," said Eddie.

"She's not, actually," said Bill. "If Ben were in y-your mundane army, do you think he'd be allowed to m-mouth off to his superiors? Absolutely not."

"Well, not during a war. But Ben isn't a soldier."

"But we're all s-soldiers. Ben as much as the rest of us. There's a hierarchy of c-command and the Inquisitor is near the top. Ben is near the b-bottom. He should have treated her with more respect."

"If you agree that he ought to be in jail, why did you ask me to come

here? Just to get me to agree with you? I don't see the point. What do you want me to do?"

"We didn't say he should be in jail," Richie snapped. "Just that he shouldn't have talked back to one of the highest-ranked members of the Clave. Besides," he added in a smaller voice, "I thought that maybe you could help."

"Help? How?"

"You can remind him that he has something to live for."

Bill looked down at the pillow in his hand and gave a sudden savage yank to the fringe. Beads rattled down onto Richie's blanket like a shower of localized rain.

Richie frowned. "Bill, don't."

Eddie wanted to tell Richie that *they* were Ben's family, that he wasn't, that their voices carried more weight with him than his ever would. But he kept hearing Ben's voice in his head. *There's darkness in me. It's always been there.* "Can we go to the Silent City and see him?"

Bill dropped the denuded pillow onto the bed and stood up, frowning. Before he could say anything, there was a knock at the door. Richie unhitched himself from the table and went to answer it.

It was a small, blonde-haired boy, his eyes half-hidden by glasses. He wore jeans and an oversize sweatshirt and carried a book in one hand. "Georgie," Richie said, with some surprise, "I thought you were asleep."

"I was in the weapons room," said the boy—who had to be the Denbroughs' youngest son. "But there were noises coming from the library. I think someone might be trying to contact the Institute." He peered around Richie at Eddie. "Who's that?"

"That's Eddie," said Bill. "He's Ben's b-brother."

Georgie's eyes rounded. "I thought Ben didn't have any siblings."

"That's w-what we all thought," said Bill, picking up the sweater he'd

left draped over one of Richie's chairs and yanking it on. His hair rayed out around his head like a soft dark halo, crackling with static electricity. He pushed it back impatiently. "I'd better get to the library."

"We'll both go," Richie said. "Maybe something's happened."

"Where are your parents?" Eddie asked.

"They got called out a few hours ago. A fey was murdered in the Summit Rock Park. The Inquisitor went with them," Richie explained.

"You didn't want to go?"

"We weren't invited." Bill took two daggers out of Richie's night table and put them inside his boots. "Look a-after Georgie will you? We'll be right b-back."

"But—" Eddie protested.

"We'll be right back, okay?" Richie said in an unusual calm voice. "Don't worry."

Bill shook his head darted out into the corridor, Richie on his heels. The moment the door shut behind them, Eddie sat down on the bed and regarded Georgie with apprehension. He'd never spent much time around children and he wasn't really sure how to talk to them or what might amuse them. It helped a little that this particular little boy reminded him of Stan at that age, with his skinny arms and legs and glasses that seemed too big for his face.

Georgie returned his stare with a considering glance of his own, not shy, but thoughtful and contained. "How old are you?" he said finally.

Eddie was taken aback. "How old do I look?"

"Fourteen."

"I'm sixteen, but people always think I'm younger than I am because I'm so short."

Georgie nodded. "Me too," he said. "I'm nine but people always think I'm seven."

"You look nine to me," said Eddie. "What's that you're holding? Is it a book?"

Georgie brought his hand out from behind his back. He was holding a wide, flat paperback, about the size of one of those small magazines they sold at grocery store counters. This one had a brightly colored cover with Japanese *kanji* script on it under the English words. Eddie laughed. "Naruto," he said. "I didn't know you liked manga. Where did you get that?"

"In the airport. I like the pictures but I can't figure out how to read it."

"Here, give it to me." Eddie flipped it open, showing him the pages. "You read it backward, right to left instead of left to right. And you read each page clockwise. Do you know what that means?"

"Of course," said Georgie. For a moment Eddie was worried he'd annoyed him. Georgie seemed pleased enough, though, when he took the book back and flipped to the last page. "This one is number nine," he said. "I think I should get the other eight before I read it."

"That's a good idea. Maybe you can get someone to take you to Midtown Comics or Forbidden Planet."

"Forbidden *Planet*?" Georgie looked bemused, but before Eddie could explain, Richie burst through the door, clearly out of breath.

"It was someone trying to contact the Institute," he said, before Eddie could ask. "One of the Silent Brothers. Something's happened in the Bone City."

"What kind of something?"

"I don't know. I've never heard of the Silent Brothers asking for help before." Richie was clearly distressed. He turned to his brother. "Georgie, go to your room and stay there, okay?"

Georgie set his jaw. "Are you and Bill going out?"

“Yes.”

“To the Silent City?”

“Georgie—”

“I want to come.”

Richie shook his head. “Absolutely not. You’re too young.”

“You’re not eighteen either!”

Richie turned to Eddie with a look half of anxiety and half of desperation. “Eds, come here for a second, please.”

Eddie got up, wonderingly—and Richie grabbed him by the arm and yanked him out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him. There was a thump as Georgie threw himself against it. “Damn it,” said Richie, holding the knob, “can you grab my stele for me, please? It’s in my pocket—”

Hastily, Eddie held out the stele Jim had given him earlier that night. “Use mine.”

With a few swift strokes, Richie had carved a Locking rune onto the door. Eddie could still hear Georgie’s protests from the other side as Richie stepped away from the door, grimacing, and handed Eddie back his stele. “I didn’t know you had one of these.”

“It was my mother’s,” said Eddie, then he mentally chided herself. *Is my mother’s. It is my mother’s.*

“Huh.” Richie thumped on the door with a closed fist. “Georgie, there’s some PowerBars in the nightstand drawer if you get hungry. We’ll be back as soon as we can.”

There was another outraged yell from behind the door; with a shrug, Richie turned and hurried back down the hallway, Eddie at his side. “What did the message say?” Eddie demanded. “Just that there was trouble?”

“That there was an attack. That’s it.”

Eddie carefully touched his shoulder. "Can we talk later?"

"About what?" Richie asked, obviously pretending that he didn't know what he was saying.

"Richie."

"Not now, okay?"

Bill was waiting for them outside the library. He was wearing black leather Shadowhunter armor over his clothes. Gauntlets protected his arms and Marks circled his throat and wrists. Seraph blades, each one named for an angel, gleamed at the belt around his waist. "Are you ready?" he said to Richie. "Is Georgie taken care of?"

"He's fine." Richie held out his arms. "Mark me."

As Bill traced the patterns of runes along the backs of Richie's hands and the insides of his wrists, he glanced over at Eddie. "You should probably head home," he said. "You don't want to be here by yourself when the Inquisitor gets back."

"I want to go with you," Eddie said, the words spilling out before he could stop them.

"But you haven't got a-any training," Bill argued. "You'll just be a liability."

Richie cut in. "If he wants to come, let him come with us."

Bill looked taken aback. "Last time we faced a d-demon, he just cowered and screamed." Seeing Eddie's acid glare, he shot him an apologetic glance. "I'm s-sorry, but it's true."

"I think he needs a chance to learn," Richie said. "You know what I always say. Sometimes you don't have to search out danger, sometimes danger finds you."

"You can't lock me up like you did Georgie," Eddie added, seeing Bill's weakening resolution. "I'm not a child. And I know where the Bone City is. I can find my way there without you."

Bill turned away, shaking his head and muttering something. Richie held out a hand to Eddie . “Give me your stele,” he said. “It’s time you got some Marks.”

Richie gave Eddie two Marks, one on the back of each hand. One was the open eye that decorated the hand of every Shadowhunter. The other was like two crossed sickles; Richie said it was a Rune of Protection. Both runes burned when the stele first touched skin, but the pain faded as Eddie, Richie and Bill headed downtown in a black gypsy cab. By the time they reached Second Avenue and stepped out onto the pavement, Eddie's hands and arms felt as light as if he were wearing water wings in a swimming pool.

The three of them were silent as they passed under the wrought iron arch and into the Marble Cemetery. The last time Eddie had been in this small courtyard he had been hurrying along after Brother Murray. Now, for the first time, he noticed the names carved into the walls: Youngblood, Henderson, Byers, Harrington, Ravenscar. There were runes beside them. In Shadowhunter culture each family had their own symbol: The Toziers’ was a blacksmith’s hammer, the Denbroughs’ a torch, and Pennywise’s a star.

The grass grew tangled over the feet of the Angel statue in the courtyard’s center. The Angel’s eyes were closed, his slim hands closed over the stem of a stone goblet, a reproduction of the Mortal Cup. His stone face was impassive, streaked with dirt and grime.

Eddie said, “Last time I was here, Brother Murray used a rune on the statue to open the door to the City.”

“I wouldn’t w-want to use one of the Silent Brothers’ runes,” Bill said. His face was grim. “They should have sensed our presence before we g-got this far. Now I’m starting to worry.” He took a dagger from his belt and drew the blade of it across his bare palm. Blood welled from the shallow gash. Making a fist over the stone Cup, he let the blood drip into it. “Blood of the Nephilim,” he said. “It should w-work as a key.”

The stone Angel’s eyelids flew open. For a moment, Eddie almost

expected to see eyes glaring at him from between the folds of stone, but there was only more granite. A second later, the grass at the Angel's feet began to split. A crooked black line, rippling like the back of a snake, curved away from the statue, and Eddie jumped back hastily as a dark hole opened at his feet.

He peered down into it. Stairs led away into shadow. Last time he had been here, the darkness had been lit at intervals by torches, illuminating the steps. Now there was only blackness.

"Are you okay?" Richie whispered to Eddie so quietly he almost didn't hear it.

"Something's wrong," Eddie said. Neither Richie nor Bill seemed inclined to argue. Eddie took the witchlight stone Richie had given him out of his pocket and raised it overhead. Light burst from it, raying out through his spread fingers. "Let's go."

Bill stepped in front of him. "I'll go f-first, then you follow me."

They clambered down slowly, Eddie's sneakers slipping on the age-rounded steps. At the foot of the stairs was a short tunnel that opened out into an enormous hall, a stone orchard of white arches inset with semiprecious stones. Rows of mausoleums huddled in the shadows like toadstool houses in a fairy story. The more distant of them disappeared into shadow; the witchlight was not strong enough to light the whole hall.

Bill looked somberly down the rows. "I n-never thought I would enter the Silent City," he said. "Not even in d-death."

"I wouldn't sound so sad about it," Richie said. "This place is so creepy."

Bill took one of his angel blades out of his weapons belt. "*Arathiel*," he whispered, and its glow joined the illumination of Eddie's witchlight as they found the second staircase and descended into even denser gloom. The witchlight pulsed in Eddie's hand like a dying star—he wondered if they ever ran out of power, witchlight stones, like flashlights ran out of batteries. He hoped not. The idea of being plunged into sightless darkness in this creepy place filled him with a visceral terror.

The smell of rotting fruit grew stronger as they reached the end of the stairs and found themselves in another long tunnel. This one opened out into a pavilion surrounded by spires of carved bone—a pavilion Eddie remembered very well. Inlaid silver stars sprinkled the floor like precious confetti. In the center of the pavilion was a black table. Dark fluid had pooled on its slick surface and trickled across the floor in rivulets.

When Eddie had stood before the Council of Brothers, there had been a heavy silver sword hanging on the wall behind the table. The Sword was gone now, and in its place, smeared across the wall, was a great fan of scarlet.

“Is that *blood*?” Richie whispered. He didn’t sound afraid, just stunned.

“Looks like it.” Bill’s eyes scanned the room. The shadows were as thick as paint, and seemed full of movement. His grip was tight on his seraph blade.

“What could have happened?” Richie said. “The Silent Brothers—I thought they were *indestructible*...”

His voice trailed off as Eddie turned, the witchlight in his hand catching strange shadows among the spires. One was more strangely shaped than the others. He willed the witchlight to burn brighter and it did, sending a lancing bolt of brightness into the distance.

Impaled on one of the spires, like a worm on a hook, was the dead body of a Silent Brother. Hands, ribboned in blood, dangled just above the marble floor. His neck looked broken. Blood had pooled beneath him, clotted and black in the witchlight.

Richie gasped. “Bill. Do you see—”

“I see.” Bill’s voice was grim. “And I’ve seen w-worse. It’s Ben I’m worried a-about.”

Richie went forward and touched the black basalt table, his fingers skimming the surface. “This blood is almost fresh. Whatever happened, it happened not long ago.”

Bill moved toward the Brother's impaled corpse. Smearred marks led away from the blood pool on the floor. "Footprints," he said. "Someone running." Bill indicated with a curled hand that the boys should follow him. They did, Richie pausing only to wipe his bloody hands on his soft leather pants.

The path of footprints led from the pavilion and down a narrow tunnel, disappearing into darkness. When Bill stopped, looking around him, Eddie pushed past him impatiently, letting the witchlight blaze a silvery-white path of light ahead of them. He could see a set of double doors at the end of the tunnel; they were ajar.

Ben. Somehow he sensed him, that he was close. He took off at a half run, his sneakers clacking loudly against the hard floor. He heard Richie call after him, and then Bill and Richie were also running, hard on his heels. He burst through the doors at the end of the hall and found himself in a large stone-bound room bisected by a row of metal bars sunk deep into the ground. Eddie could just make out a slumped shape on the other side of the bars. Just outside the cell sprawled the limp form of a Silent Brother.

Eddie knew immediately that he was dead. It was the way he was lying, like a doll whose joints had been twisted the wrong way until they broke. His parchment-colored robes were half-torn off. His scarred face, contorted into a look of utter terror, was still recognizable. It was Brother Murray.

Eddie pushed past his body to the door of the cell. It was made of bars spaced close together and hinged on one side. There seemed to be no lock or knob that he could pull. He heard Bill, behind him, say his name, but Eddie's attention wasn't on him: It was on the door. Of course there was no visible way to open it, he realized; the Brothers didn't deal in what was visible, but rather what wasn't. Holding the witchlight in one hand, he scrabbled for his mother's stele with the other.

From the other side of the bars came a noise. A sort of muffled gasp or whisper; he wasn't sure which, but he recognized the source. Ben. Eddie slashed at the cell door with the tip of his stele, trying to hold the rune for Open in his mind even as it appeared, black and jagged against the hard metal. The electrum sizzled where the stele touched

it. *Open*, he willed the door, *open, open, OPEN!*

A noise like ripping cloth tore through the room. Eddie heard Richie gasp the door blew off its hinges entirely, crashing into the cell like a drawbridge falling. Eddie could hear other noises, metal coming uncoupled from metal, a loud rattle like a handful of tossed pebbles. He ducked into the cell, the fallen door wobbling under his feet.

Witchlight filled the small room, lighting it as bright as day. He barely noticed the rows of manacles—all of different metals: gold, silver, steel, and iron—as they came undone from the bolts in the walls and clattered to the stone floor. His eyes were on the slumped figure in the corner; he could see the bright hair, the hand outstretched, the loose manacle lying a little distance away. His wrist was bare and bloody, the skin braceleted with ugly bruises.

Eddie went down on his knees, setting his stele aside, and gently turned them over. It was Ben. There was another bruise on his cheek, and his face was very white, but Eddie could see the darting movement under his eyelids. A vein pulsed at his throat. He was alive.

He stroked Ben's hair back from his forehead with a tenderness that felt foreign to him—he'd never had any brothers or sisters, not even a cousin. He'd never had occasion to bind up wounds or kiss scraped knees or take care of anyone, really.

Ben's eyes opened. The pupils were huge, dilated. Maybe he'd banged his head? His eyes fixed on Eddie with a look of dazed bemusement. "Eddie," he said. "What are you doing here? I'm not dead, am I?"

"No," Eddie said. "You passed out, is all. Probably hit your head too."

"What's going on?" It was Bill, ducking through the low doorway, Richie just behind him.

Ben struggled into a sitting position. His face was gray, his shirt spotted with blood. Bill's look turned to one of concern. "And are y-you all right?" he demanded, kneeling down. "What happened? C-can you remember?"

Ben held up his uninjured hand. "One question at a time, Bill. My head already feels like it's going to split open."

"Who did this to you?" Richie sounded both bewildered and furious.

"No one did anything to me. I did it to myself trying to get the manacles off." Ben looked down at his wrist—it looked as if he'd nearly scraped all the skin off it—and winced.

"Here," said both Eddie and Richie at the same time, reaching out for his hand. Their eyes met, and Eddie dropped his hand first. Richie took hold of Ben's wrist and drew out his stele; with a few quick flicks of his wrist, he drew an iratze—a healing rune—just below the bracelet of bleeding skin.

"Thanks," said Ben, drawing his hand back. The injured part of his wrist was already beginning to knit back together. "Brother Murray —"

"Is dead," said Eddie

"I know," Ben pulled himself up to a standing position, using the wall to hold himself up. "He was murdered."

"Did the Silent Brothers kill each other?" Richie asked. "I don't understand—I don't understand why they'd do that—"

"They didn't," said Ben. "Something killed them. I don't know what." A spasm of pain twisted his face. "My head—"

"Maybe we should go," said Eddie nervously. "Before whatever killed them..."

Richie kicked a doused torch out of his way. "We need to get out of here. If there's something out there nasty enough to kill the Silent Brothers, it'll make short work of us."

"Richie's right. We should go." Eddie retrieved the witchlight and stood up. "Ben—are you okay to walk?"

"He can lean on me." Bill drew Ben's arm across his shoulders. Ben leaned heavily against him. "C-come on," Bill said gently. "We'll fix

you up when w-we get outside."

Slowly they moved toward the cell door, where Ben paused, staring down at the figure of Brother Murray lying twisted on the paving stones. Richie knelt down and drew the Silent Murray's brown wool hood down to cover his contorted face. When he straightened up, all their faces were grave.

"I've never s-seen a Silent Brother afraid," Bill said. "I didn't think it was possible for them to f-feel fear."

"Everyone feels fear." Ben was still very pale, and though he was cradling his injured hand against his chest, Eddie didn't think it was because of physical pain. He looked distant, as if he had withdrawn into himself, hiding from something.

They retraced their steps through the dark corridors and up the narrow steps that led to the pavilion of the Speaking Stars. When they reached it, Eddie noticed the thick scent of blood and burning as he hadn't when he'd passed through it before. Ben, leaning on Bill, looked around with a sort of mingled horror and confusion on his face. Eddie saw that he was staring at the far wall where it was splattered thickly with blood, and he said, "Ben. Don't look." Then he felt stupid; Ben was a demon hunter, after all, he'd seen worse.

Ben shook his head. "Something feels wrong—"

"Everything f-feels wrong here." Bill tilted his head toward the forest of arches that led away from the pavilion. "That's the fastest way out of h-here. Let's go."

They didn't talk much as they made their way back through the Bone City. Every shadow seemed to surge with movement, as if the darkness concealed creatures waiting to jump out at them. Richie was whispering something under his breath. Though Eddie couldn't hear the words themselves, it sounded like another language, something old—Latin, maybe.

When they reached the stairs that led up out of the City, Eddie breathed a silent sigh of relief. The Bone City might have been beautiful once, but it was terrifying now. As they reached the last

flight of steps, light stabbed into his eyes, making him cry out in surprise. He could faintly see the Angel statue that stood at the head of the stairs, backlit with brilliant golden light, bright as day. He glanced around at the others; they looked as confused as he felt.

“The sun couldn’t have risen yet—could it?” Richie murmured. “How long were we down here?”

Bill checked his watch. “Not that long.”

Ben muttered something, too low for anyone else to hear him. Bill craned his ear down. “W-what did you say?”

“Witchlight,” Ben said, more loudly this time.

Richie hurried up the stairs, Eddie behind him, Bill just behind them, struggling to half-carry Ben up the steps. At the head of the stairs Richie stopped suddenly as if frozen. Eddie called out to him, but he didn’t move. A moment later Eddie was standing beside him and it was his turn to stare around in amazement.

The garden was full of Shadowhunters—twenty, maybe thirty, of them in dark hunting regalia, inked with Marks, each holding a blazing witchlight stone.

At the front of the group stood Sharon, in black Shadowhunter armor and a cloak, her hood thrown back. Behind her ranged dozens of strangers, men and women Eddie had never seen, but who bore the Marks of the Nephilim on their arms and faces. One of them, a handsome ebony-skinned man, turned to stare at Eddie and Richie—and beside him, at Ben and Bill, who had come up from the steps and stood blinking in the unexpected light.

“By the Angel,” the man said. “Sharon—there was already someone down there.”

Sharon’s mouth opened in a silent gasp when she saw Richie. Then she closed it, her lips tightening into a thin white line, like a slash drawn in chalk across her face.

“I know, Malik,” she said. “These are my children.”

Notes for the Chapter:

#RIPMurray you will be missed. Lol

9. The Mortal Sword

A muttering gasp went through the crowd. The ones who were hooded threw their hoods back, and Eddie could see from the looks on the faces of Ben, Bill, and Richie that many of the Shadowhunters in the courtyard were familiar to them.

"By the Angel." Sharon's incredulous gaze swept from Bill to Ben, passed over Eddie, and returned to Richie. Ben had moved away from Bill the moment Sharon spoke, and he stood a little way away from the other three, his hands in his pockets as Bill nervously touched his own wrist. Richie, meanwhile, seemed to be fidgeting with his cell phone, though Eddie couldn't imagine who he might be calling. "What are you doing here, Bill? Richie? There was a distress call from the Silent City—"

"W-we answered it," Bill said. His gaze moved anxiously over the gathered crowd. Eddie could hardly blame him for his nerves. This was the largest crowd of adult Shadowhunters—of Shadowhunters in general—that he himself had ever seen. He kept looking from face to face, marking the differences between them—they varied widely in age and race and overall appearance, and yet they all gave the same impression of immense, contained power. He could sense their subtle gazes on him, examining him, evaluating. One of them, a woman with rippling silver hair, was staring at him so fiercely that there was nothing subtle about it. Eddie blinked and looked away as Bill continued, "You w-weren't at the Institute—and we couldn't raise anyone—so we c-came ourselves."

"Bill—"

"It doesn't matter, a-anyway," Bill said. "They're dead. The Silent Brothers. They're all dead. They've b-been murdered."

This time there was no sound from the assembled crowd. Instead they seemed to go still, the way a pride of lions might go still when it spotted a gazelle.

"Dead?" Sharon repeated. "What do you mean, they're dead?"

"I think it's quite clear what he means." A woman in a long gray coat had appeared suddenly at Sharon's side. In the flickering light she looked to Eddie like a sort of Edward Gorey caricature, all sharp angles and pulled-back hair and eyes like black pits scraped out of her face. She held a glimmering chunk of witchlight on a long silver chain, looped through the skinniest fingers Eddie had ever seen. "They are all dead?" she asked, addressing herself to Bill. "You found no one alive in the City?"

Bill shook his head. "Not that w-we saw, Inquisitor."

So that was the Inquisitor, Eddie realized. She certainly looked like someone capable of tossing teenage boys into dungeon cells for no reason other than that she didn't like their attitude.

"That you *saw*," repeated the Inquisitor, her eyes like hard, glittering beads. She turned to Sharon. "There may yet be survivors. I would send your people into the City for a thorough check."

Sharon's lips tightened. From what very little Eddie had learned about Sharon, he knew that she didn't like being told what to do. "Very well." She turned to the rest of the Shadowhunters—there were not as many, Eddie was coming to realize, as he had initially thought, closer to twenty than thirty, though the shock of their appearance had made them seem like a teeming crowd.

Sharon spoke to Malik in a low voice. He nodded. Taking the arm of the silver-haired woman, he led the Shadowhunters toward the entrance to the Bone City. As one after another descended the stairs, taking their witchlight with them, the glow in the courtyard began to fade. The last one in line was the woman with the silver hair. Halfway down the stairs she paused, turned, and looked back—directly at Eddie. Her eyes were full of a terrible yearning, as if she longed desperately to tell Eddie something. After a moment she drew her hood back up over her face and vanished into the shadows.

Sharon broke the silence. "Why would anyone murder the Silent Brothers? They're not warriors, they don't carry battle Marks—"

"Don't be naïve, Sharon," said the Inquisitor. "This was no random attack. The Silent Brothers may not be warriors, but they are

primarily guardians, and very good at their jobs. Not to mention hard to kill. Someone wanted something from the Bone City and was willing to kill the Silent Brothers to get it. This was premeditated."

"What makes you so sure?"

"That wild goose chase that called us all out to Summit Rock Park? The dead fey child?"

"I wouldn't call that a wild goose chase. The fey child was drained of blood, like the others. These killings could cause serious trouble between the Night Children and other Downworlders—"

"Distractions," said the Inquisitor dismissively. "He wanted us gone from the Institute so that no one would respond to the Brothers when they called for aid. Ingenious, really. But then he always was ingenious."

"He?" It was Richie who spoke, his face very pale. "You mean—"

Ben's next words sent a shock through Eddie, as if he'd touched a live current. "Pennywise," he said. "Pennywise took the Mortal Sword. That's why he killed the Silent Brothers."

A thin, sudden smile curved on the Inquisitor's face, as if Ben had said something that pleased her very much. Bill started and turned to stare at Ben. "*Pennywise*? But you d-didn't say he was here."

"Nobody asked."

"He couldn't have k-killed the Brothers. They were torn apart. No one p-person could have done all that."

"He probably had demonic help," said the Inquisitor. "He's used demons to aid him before. And with the protection of the Cup on him, he could summon some very dangerous creatures. More dangerous than Raveners," she added with a curl of her lip, and though she didn't look at Eddie when she said it, the words felt somehow like a verbal slap. Eddie's faint hope that the Inquisitor hadn't noticed or recognized him vanished. "Or the pathetic Forsaken."

"I don't know about that." Ben was very pale, with hectic spots like fever on his cheekbones. "But it was Pennywise. I saw him. In fact, he had the Sword with him when he came down to the cells and taunted me through the bars. It was like a bad movie, except he didn't actually twirl his mustache."

Eddie looked at him worriedly. He was talking too fast, he thought, and looked unsteady on his feet.

The Inquisitor didn't seem to notice. "So you're saying that Pennwysie *told* you all this? He told you he killed the Silent Brothers because he wanted the Angel's Sword?"

"What else did he tell you? Did he tell you where he was going? What he plans to do with the two Mortal Instruments?" Sharon asked quickly.

Ben shook his head.

The Inquisitor moved toward him, her coat swirling around her like drifting smoke. Her gray eyes and gray mouth were drawn into tight horizontal lines. "I don't believe you."

Ben just looked at her.

Richie said hotly. "Ben isn't a liar—"

"Use your brain, Richard," said the Inquisitor, not taking her eyes off Ben. "Leave aside your loyalty to your friend for a moment. What's the likelihood that Pennywise stopped by his son's cell for a paternal chat about the Soul-Sword, and didn't mention what he planned to do with it, or even where he was going? And doesn't it seem odd to anyone that the Soul-Sword should disappear the night before Jonathan Gray were supposed to stand trial by its blade—and that his father is the one who took it?"

"My name is Ben," Ben said angrily. "And my father didn't take the Sword for me. He took it for *him*. I doubt he even knew about the trial."

The Inquisitor regarded him with something close to boredom. "If your father didn't take the Sword to protect you, then why did he

take it?"

"It's a Mortal Instrument," said Eddie. "It's powerful. Like the Cup. Pennywise likes power."

"The Cup has an immediate use," said the Inquisitor. "He can use it to make an army. The Sword is used in trials. I can't see how that would interest him."

"He might have done it to destabilize the Clave," suggested Sharon. "To sap our morale. To say that there is nothing we can protect from him if he wants it badly enough." It was a surprisingly good argument, Eddie thought, but Sharon didn't sound very convinced. "The fact is—"

But they never got to hear what the fact was, because at that moment Ben raised his hand as if he meant to ask a question, looked startled, and sat down on the grass suddenly, as if his legs had given out. Bill knelt down next to him, but Ben waved away his concern. "Leave me alone. I'm fine."

"You're not fine." Eddie joined Bill on the grass. He glanced down at Ben's wrist, where Richie had drawn the *iratze*. The Mark was gone, not even a faint white scar left behind to show that it had worked. His eyes met Bill's and he saw his own anxiety reflected there. "Something's wrong with him," Eddie said. "Something serious."

"He probably needs a healing rune." The Inquisitor looked as if she were exquisitely annoyed at Ben for being injured during events of such importance. "An *iratze*, or—"

"W-we tried that," said Bill. "It isn't working. I think there's something of demonic origin going on here."

"Like demon poison?" Sharon moved as if she meant to go to Ben, but the Inquisitor held her back.

"He's shamming," she said. "He ought to be in the Silent City's cells right now."

"You can't say that—look at him!" Richie straightened up and gestured at Ben, who had slumped back on the grass, his eyes closed.

"He can't even stand up. He needs doctors, he needs—"

"The Silent Brothers are dead," said the Inquisitor. "Are you suggesting a mundane hospital?"

"No." Richie's voice was tight. "I thought he could go to Eleven. She's the High Witch of Brooklyn."

"You mean Jane Ives," said Sharon. "She has a reputation—"

"She healed Bill after I fought a Greater Demon," said Richie. "The Silent Brothers couldn't do anything, but she..."

"It's ridiculous," said the Inquisitor. "What you want is to help Jonathan escape."

"He's not w-well enough to escape," Bill said. "Can't you s-see that?"

"Eleven is not interested in crossing the Clave." Richie said.

"And how would she propose preventing it?" The Inquisitor's voice dripped acid sarcasm. "Jonathan is a Shadowhunter; we're not so easy to keep under lock and key."

"Maybe you should ask her," Eddie suggested.

The Inquisitor smiled her razor smile. "By all means. Where is she?"

Richie glanced down at the phone in his hand and then back at the thin gray figure in front of him. "She's here," he said. He raised his voice. "Eleven! Come here!"

Even the Inquisitor's eyebrows shot up when Eleven strode through the gate. The High Witch was wearing black leather pants, a belt with a buckle in the shape of a jeweled J, and a cobalt-blue Prussian jacket open over a white lace shirt. She shimmered with layers of glitter. "I have no idea how you got my number, and I don't want to know." She said to Richie before approaching Ben. "Is he dead?" she inquired. "He looks dead."

"No," snapped Sharon. "He's not dead."

"Have you checked? I could kick him if you want." Eleven moved toward Ben.

"Stop that!" the Inquisitor snapped, sounding like Eddie's third-grade teacher demanding that he stop doodling on his desk with a marker. "He's not dead, but he's injured," she added, almost grudgingly. "Your medical skills are required. Jonathan needs to be well enough for the interrogation."

"Fine, but it'll cost you."

"I'll pay it," said Sharon.

The Inquisitor didn't even blink. "Very well. But he can't remain at the Institute. Just because the Sword is gone doesn't mean the interrogation won't proceed as planned. And in the meantime, the boy must be held under observation. He's clearly a flight risk."

"A flight risk?" Richie demanded. "You act as if he tried to escape from the Silent City—"

"Well," the Inquisitor said. "He's no longer in his cell now, is he?"

"That's not fair! You couldn't have expected him to stay down there surrounded by dead people!"

"Not fair? Not *fair*? Do you honestly expect me to believe that you and your brother were motivated to come to the Bone City because of a distress call, and not because you wanted to free Jonathan from what you clearly consider unnecessary confinement? And do you expect me to believe you won't try to free him again if he's allowed to remain at the Institute? Do you think you can fool me as easily as you fool your parents, Richard Tozier?"

Richie turned scarlet. At that moment, Eddie suppressed the urge to beat the crap out of that woman. Eleven cut in before Richie could reply.

"The boy can stay with me," Eleven said, shrugging her shoulders.

The Inquisitor shot her an acid glare. "You do realize," she said. "that Jonathan is a witness of utmost importance to the Clave?"

"I've held prisoners for the Clave before," Eleven said. The joking edge had left her voice. "I think you'll find I have an excellent record in that department. My contract is one of the best."

The Inquisitor made a sharp noise that might have been amusement or disgust, and said, "It's settled, then. Let me know when he's well enough to talk, warlock. I've still got plenty of questions for him."

"Of course," Eleven said, but Eddie got the sense that she wasn't really listening to her. She crossed the lawn gracefully and came to stand over Ben; she was as tall as she was thin, and when Eddie glanced up to look at her, he was surprised how many stars she blotted out. "Can he talk?" Eleven asked Eddie, indicating Ben.

Before Eddie could respond, Ben's eyes slid open. He looked up at the Eleven, dazed and dizzy. "Am I in hell?"

Notes for the Chapter:

I watched infinity war and I'm still traumatized lmao

10. The Infernal Conversion

In the dream Eddie was a child again, walking down the narrow strip of beach near the boardwalk at Coney Island. The air was thick with the smell of hot dogs and roasting peanuts, and with the shouts of children. The sea surged in the distance, its blue-gray surface alive with sunlight.

He could see himself as if from a distance, wearing oversize child's pajamas. The hems of the pajama bottoms dragged along the beach. Damp sand grated between his toes. There were no clouds and the sky was blue and clear, but he shivered as he walked along the perimeter of the water toward a figure he could see only dimly in the distance.

As he approached, the figure became suddenly clear, as if Eddie had focused the lens of a camera. It was his mother, kneeling in the ruins of a half-built sand castle. She wore the same white dress Pennywise had put her in at Renwick's. In her hand was a twisted bit of driftwood, silvery from long exposure to salt and wind.

"Have you come to help me?" his mother said, raising her head. Sonia's hair was undone and it blew free in the wind, making her look younger than she was. "There's so much to do and so little time."

Eddie swallowed against the hard lump in his throat. "Mom—I've missed you, Mom."

Sonia smiled. "I've missed you, too, honey. But I'm not gone, you know. I'm only sleeping."

"Then how do I wake you up?" Eddie cried, but his mother was looking out to sea, her face troubled. The sky had turned a twilight iron gray and the black clouds looked like heavy stones.

"Come here," said Sonia, and when Eddie came to her, she said, "Hold out your arm."

Eddie did. Sonia moved the driftwood over his skin. The touch stung like the burning of a stele, and left the same thick black line behind. The rune Sonia drew was a shape Eddie had never seen before, but he found it instinctively soothing to his eye. "What does this do?"

"It should protect you." *Eddie's mother released him.*

"Against what?"

Sonia didn't answer, just looked out toward the sea. Eddie turned and saw that the ocean had drawn far out, leaving brackish piles of garbage, heaps of seaweed and flopping, desperate fish in its wake. The water had gathered itself into a huge wave, rising like the side of a mountain, like an avalanche ready to fall. The shouts of children from the boardwalk had turned into screams. As Eddie stared in horror, he saw that the side of the wave was as transparent as a membrane, and through it he could see things that seemed to move under the surface of the sea, huge dark shapeless things pushing against the skin of the water. He threw up his hands—

And woke up, gasping, his heart slamming painfully against his ribs. He was in his bed in the spare room in Jim's house, and afternoon light was filtering in through the curtains. His hair was plastered to his neck with sweat, and his arm burned and ached. When he sat up and flipped on the bedside light, he saw without surprise the black Mark that ran the length of his forearm.

When he went into the kitchen, he found Jim had left breakfast for him in the form of a Danish in a grease-spotted cardboard box. He'd also left a note stuck to the fridge. *Gone to the hospital.*

Eddie ate the Danish on the way to meet Stan. He was supposed to be on the corner of Bedford by the L train stop at five, but he wasn't. Eddie felt a faint tug of anxiety before he remembered the used record store on the corner of Sixth. Sure enough, he was sorting through the CDs in the new arrivals section. He wore a rust-colored corduroy jacket with a torn sleeve and a blue T-shirt bearing the logo of a headphone-wearing boy dancing with a chicken. He grinned when he saw Eddie. "Belch thinks we should change the name of our band to Mojo Pie," he said, by way of greeting.

"What is it now? I forgot."

"Champagne Enema," he said, selecting a Yo La Tengo CD.

"Change it," Eddie said. "By the way, I know what your T-shirt

means."

"No you don't." Stan headed up to the front of the store to buy his CD. "You're a good boy."

Outside, the wind was cold and brisk. Eddie shivered and hugged himself. "I was worried when I didn't see you at the L stop."

Stan pulled his knit cap down, wincing as if the sunlight hurt his eyes. "Sorry. I remembered I wanted this CD, and I thought—"

"It's fine." Eddie waved a hand at him. "It's me. I panic way too easily these days."

"Well, after what you've been through, no one could blame you." Stan sounded contrite. "I still can't believe what happened to the Silent City. I can't believe you were there."

"Neither could Jim. He freaked out completely."

"I bet." They were walking through McCarren Park, the grass underfoot turning winter brown, the air full of golden light. Dogs were running off their leashes among the trees. *Everything changes in my life, and the world stays the same*, Eddie thought.

"Have you talked to Ben since it happened?" Stan asked, keeping his voice neutral.

"No, but I checked in with Richie a few times. Apparently he's fine."

"Did Richie ask to see you? Is that why we're going?"

"I want to see my brother," Eddie tried to keep the irritation out of his voice as they turned onto Eleven's street. It was lined with low warehouse buildings that had been converted into lofts and studios for artistic—and wealthy—residents. Most of the cars parked along the shallow curb were expensive.

As they neared Eleven's building, Eddie saw a lanky figure unfurl itself from where it had been sitting on the stoop. Bill. He was wearing a long black coat made of the tough, slightly shiny material Shadowhunters liked to use for their gear. His hands and throat were

marked with runes, and it was evident from the faint shimmer in the air around him that he was glamoured into invisibility.

"I didn't know you w-were bringing the *mundane*." His blue eyes flicked uneasily over Stan.

"That's what I like about you people," said Stan. "You always make me feel so welcome."

"Oh, come on, Bill," said Eddie. "What's the big deal? It's not like Stan hasn't been here before."

Bill heaved a theatrical sigh, shrugged, and led the way up the stairs. He unlocked the door to Eleven's apartment just by twisting the knob, meaning she didn't locked up her own house.

In daylight the apartment looked the way an empty nightclub might look during off hours: dark, dirty, and unexpectedly small. The walls were bare, spackled here and there with glitter paint, and the floorboards where faeries had danced a week ago were warped and shiny with age.

"Guys!" A feminine voice said. Beverly was seating in the big red couch, with her phone on her hand. "What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?" Stan asked.

Beverly rolled her eyes. "I supposedly had classes with Eleven, but it basically consisted of me watching her eat an entire bowl of chocolate ice cream."

"That sounds about right," Eleven swept toward them. She was wearing a floor-length green silk dress and was barefoot. The corners of her mouth were filled with chocolate, and so were some parts of her dress. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"We came to see Ben," Eddie said. "Is he all right?"

"I don't know," Eleven said. "Does he normally just lie on the floor like that without moving?"

"What—," Bill began, and broke off as Eleven laughed. "That's not

funny."

"It is, you just don't find the humor. And yes, your friend is just fine. Well, except that he keeps putting all my things away and trying to clean up. Now I can't find anything. He's compulsive."

"That's weird." Eddie said, remembering his messy room back at the Institute.

"Ben is in there if you want to see him." She pointed toward a door at the end of the room. "Beverly, dear, our session is over." She wiggled her fingers around her face and the remains of the ice cream disappeared.

Beverly sighed, and grabbed her bag, putting her phone inside it. "Thanks for letting me use your Wi-Fi."

"No problem, I'm not a monster."

"In there" turned out to be a medium-size den—surprisingly cozy, with smudged walls, velvet curtains drawn across the windows, and cloth-draped armchairs marooned like fat, colorful icebergs in a sea of nubby beige carpeting. A hot-pink couch was made up with sheets and a blanket. Next to it was a duffel bag stuffed full of clothes. No light came through the heavy curtains; the only source of illumination was a flickering television screen, which glowed brightly despite the fact that the television itself was not plugged in.

"What's on?" Eleven inquired.

"*What Not to Wear*," came a familiar drawling voice, emanating from a sprawled figure in one of the armchairs. He sat forward and for a moment Eddie thought Ben might get up and greet them. Instead, he shook his head at the screen. "High-waisted khaki pants? Who *wears* those?" He turned and glared at Eleven. "Nearly unlimited supernatural power," he said, "and all you do is use it to watch reruns. What a waste."

Eleven clapped her hands together and the room was suddenly flooded with light. Ben, slumped in the chair, raised an arm to cover his face. "Can you do *that* without magic?"

"Actually," said Stan, "yes. If you watched infomercials, you'd know that."

Eddie sensed the mood in the room was deteriorating. "That's enough," he said. He looked at Ben, who had lowered his arm and was blinking resentfully into the light. "We need to talk," he said. "All of us. About what we're going to do now."

"I was going to watch *Project Runway*," said Ben. "It's on next."

"No you're not," said Beverly. She snapped her fingers and the TV went off, releasing a small puff of smoke as the picture died. "You need to deal with this."

Eleven gave her a proud smile.

"Fine." Ben got up out of the chair. He was barefoot and there was a line of purplish silver skin around his wrist where his injuries were still healing. He looked tired, but not as if he were still in pain. "You want a round table meeting, we can have a round table meeting." He said to Eleven.

"I love round tables," said Eleven brightly. "They suit me so much better than square."

In the living room Eleven conjured up an enormous circular table surrounded by six highbacked wooden chairs. "That's amazing," Eddie said, sliding into a chair. It was surprisingly comfortable. "How can you create something out of nothing like that?"

"You can't," said Eleven. "Everything comes from somewhere. These come from an antiques reproduction store on Fifth Avenue, for instance. And these"—suddenly five white waxed paper cups appeared on the table, steam rising gently from the holes in their plastic lids—"come from Dean & DeLuca on Broadway."

"That seems like stealing, doesn't it?" Beverly pulled a cup toward her. She drew the lid back. "Ooh. Mochaccino."

Stan looked at Eleven. "Did you pay for these?"

"Sure," said Eleven while Ben and Bill snickered. "I make dollar bills

magically appear in their cash register."

"Really?"

"No." Eleven popped the lid off her own coffee. "But you can pretend I did if it makes you feel better. So, first order of business is what?"

Eddie put his hands around his own coffee cup. Maybe it was stolen, but it was also hot and full of caffeine. He could stop by Dean & DeLuca and drop a dollar in their tip jar some other time. "Figuring out what's going on would be a start," he said, blowing on his foam. "Ben, you said what happened in the Silent City was Pennywise's fault?"

Ben stared down at his coffee. "Yes."

Bill put his hand on Ben's arm. "W-what happened? Did you see him?"

"I was in the cell," said Ben, his voice dead. "I heard the Silent Brothers screaming. Then Pennywise came downstairs with—with something. I don't know what it was. Like smoke, with glowing eyes. A demon, but not like any I've ever seen before. He came up to the bars and he told me..."

"Told you what?" Bill's hand slid up Ben's arm to his shoulder. For a little moment something flashed across Stan's face, Eddie could see, uncertainty? But didn't comment about tit.

"Maellartach," Ben said. "He wanted the Soul-Sword and he killed the Silent Brothers to get it."

Eleven was frowning. "Why was no one at the Institute?"

Bill cleared his throat. "There w-was a Downworlder murder in Summit Rock Park last night, a f-faerie child was killed. The body was d-drained of blood."

"I bet the Inquisitor thinks I did that, too," said Ben. "My reign of terror continues."

Eleven stood up and went to the window. She pushed the curtain back, letting in just enough light to silhouette her hawklike profile.

"Blood," she said, half to herself. "I had a dream two nights ago. I saw a city all of blood, with towers made of bone, and blood ran in the streets like water."

Stan slewed his eyes over to Beverly. "Is standing by the window muttering about blood something she does all the time?"

"No," said Beverly, "sometimes she sits on the couch and does it."

Eddie shot them both a sharp glance. "Eleven, what's wrong?"

"The blood," said Eleven again. "It can't be a coincidence." She seemed to be looking down at the street. Sunset was coming on fast over the silhouette of the city in the distance: The sky was striped with bars of aluminum and rosy gold. "There have been several murders this week," she said, "of Downworlders. A warlock, killed in an apartment tower down by the South Street Seaport. Her neck and wrists were cut and the body drained of blood. And a werewolf was killed at the Hunter's Moon a few days ago. The throat was cut in that case as well."

"I was there," Beverly said. "It was terrifying."

"It sounds like vampires," said Stan, suddenly very pale.

"I don't think so," Ben said. "At least, Adrian said it wasn't the Night Children's work. He seemed adamant about it."

"Yeah, 'cause *he's* trustworthy," muttered Stan.

"In this case I think he was telling the truth," said Eleven, drawing the curtain closed. Her face was angular, shadowed. As she came back to the table, Eddie saw that she was carrying a heavy book bound in green cloth. He didn't think she'd been holding it a few moments ago. "There was a strong demonic presence at both locations. I think someone else was responsible for all three deaths. Not Adrian and his tribe, but Pennwyise."

Eddie's eyes went to Ben. His mouth was a thin line, but "Why do you say that?" was all he asked.

"The Inquisitor thought the faerie murder was a diversion," Eddie said

quickly. "So that he could plunder the Silent City without worrying about the Conclave."

"There are easier ways to create a diversion," said Ben, "and it is unwise to antagonize the Fair Folk. He wouldn't have murdered one of the clan of faerie if he didn't have a reason."

"He had a reason," said Eleven. "There was something he wanted from the faerie child, just as there was something he wanted from the warlock and the werewolf he killed."

"W-what's that?" Bill asked.

"Their blood," said Eleven, and opened the green book. The thin parchment pages had words written on them that glowed like fire. "Ah," she said, "here." She looked up, tapping the page with a sharp fingernail. Eddie leaned forward. "You won't be able to read it," Eleven warned him. "It's written in a demon language. Purgatic."

"I c-can recognize the drawing. That's Maellartach. I've seen it b-before in books." Bill pointed at an illustration of a silver sword, familiar to Eddie—it was the one he'd noticed was missing from the wall of the Silent City.

"The Ritual of Infernal Conversion," Eleven said. "That's what Pennywise's trying to do."

"The what of what?" Beverly frowned.

"Every magical object has an alliance," Eleven explained. "The alliance of the Soul-Sword is seraphic—like those angel knives Shadowhunters use, but a thousand times more so, because its power was drawn from the Angel himself, not simply from the invocation of an angelic name. What Pennywise wants to do is reverse its alliance—make it an object of demonic rather than angelic power."

"Lawful good to lawful evil!" said Stan, pleased.

"He's quoting Dungeons and Dragons," said Beverly. "Ignore him."

"As the Angel's Sword, Maellartach's use to Pennywise would be limited," said Eleven. "But as a sword whose demonic power is equal

to the angelic power it once possessed—well, there is much it could offer him. Power over demons, for one. Not just the limited protection the Cup might offer, but power to call demons to him, to force them to do his bidding."

"A d-demon army?" said Bill.

"This guy is big on armies," observed Stan.

"Power even to bring them into Derry, perhaps," Eleven finished.

"I don't know why he'd want to go there," Stan said. "That's where all the demon hunters are, aren't they? Wouldn't they just *annihilate* the demon guys?"

"Demons come from other dimensions," said Ben. "We don't know how many of them there are. Their numbers could be infinite. The wardings keep most of them back, but if they all came through at once..."

Infinite, Eddie thought. He remembered the Greater Demon, Abbadon, and tried to imagine hundreds more of it. Or thousands. His skin felt cold and exposed.

"I don't get it," said Beverly. "What does the ritual have to do with dead Downworlders?"

"To perform the Ritual of Conversion, you need to seethe the Sword until it's red-hot, then cool it four times, each time in the blood of a Downworld child. Once in the blood of a child of Lilith, once in the blood of a child of the moon, once in the blood of a child of the night, and once in the blood of a child of faerie," Eleven explained.

"Oh my God," said Eddie. "So he's not done killing? There's still one more child to go?"

"Two more. Eleven shut the book, dust puffing out from its pages. "Whatever Pennywise's ultimate goal is, he's already more than halfway to reversing the Sword. He's probably able to garner some power from it already. He could already be calling on demons—"

"But you'd think if he were doing that, there'd be reports of

disturbances, excess demon activity," Ben said. "But the Inquisitor said the opposite is true—that everything's been quiet."

"And so it might be," said Eleven, "if Pennywise were calling all the demons to him. No wonder it's quiet."

The group stared at one another. Before anyone could think of a single thing to say, a sharp noise cut through the room, making Eddie start.

"It's my m-mother," said Bill, checking his phone. "I'll be right b-back." He went over to the window, head down, voice too low to overhear.

Minutes later, Bill returned and flicked a strand of hair out of his eyes. "I told m-my mother about t-the Infernal Conversion."

"Let me guess," said Ben. "She didn't believe you. Plus, she blamed everything on me."

Bill frowned. "Not exactly. She s-said she'd bring it up with the Conclave, but that she didn't h-have the Inquisitor's ear right now. I get the feeling the Inquisitor has p-pushed Mom out of the way and taken over. She s-sounded angry." The phone in his hand rang again. He held up a finger. "S-sorry. It's Richie. One sec." He wandered to the window, phone in hand.

Beverly glanced over at Eleven. "I think you're right about the werewolf at the Hunter's Moon. The guy who found his body said someone else was in the alley with him. Someone who ran off."

Eleven nodded. "It sounds to me like Pennywise was interrupted in the middle of doing whatever it is he does to get the blood he needs. He'll probably try again with a different lycanthrope child."

"I ought to warn Jim," Eddie said, half-rising out of his chair.

"Wait." Bill was back, phone in hand, a peculiar expression on his face.

"What did Richie want?" Ben asked.

Bill hesitated. "Richie s-says the Queen of the Seelie Court has requested an a-audience with us."

"Sure," said Eleven. "And Madonna wants me as a backup dancer on her next world tour."

Bill looked puzzled. "Who's Madonna?"

"Who's the Queen of the Seelie Court?" said Eddie.

"She is the Queen of Faerie," said Eleven. "Well, the local one, anyway."

Ben put his head in his hands. "Tell Richie no."

"But he thinks it's a g-good idea," Bill protested

"Then tell him no *twice*."

Bill frowned. "W-what's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, just that some of Richie's ideas are world-beaters and some are total disasters. Remember that idea he had about using abandoned subway tunnels to get around under the city? Talk about giant rats—"

"This is d-different," said Bill. "He wants us to go to the Seelie Court."

"You're right, this is different," said Ben. "This is his worst idea ever."

"He knows a k-knight in the Court," said Bill. "He told Richie that the Seelie Queen is interested in m-meeting with us. Richie overheard my c-conversation with our mother—and he thought if w-we could explain our theory about Pennywise a-and the Soul-Sword to the Queen, the Seelie Court would side with us, maybe e-even ally with us against Pennywise."

"Is it safe to go there?" Eddie asked. "I mean, I don't know anything about the Seelie Court. Vampires and werewolves I get. There are enough movies about them. But faeries are little-kid stuff. Beverly dressed up as a faerie for Halloween when we were eight."

"I remember that." Stan had leaned back in his chair, arms crossed

over his chest. "I was a Transformer. Actually, I was a Decepticon."

"Can we get back to the point?" Beverly asked.

"Fine," Bill said. "Richie thinks—and I agree—that it's not a good idea to ignore the Fair Folk. If they want to talk, what harm can it do? Besides, if the Seelie Court were on our side, the Clave would have to listen to what we have to say."

Ben laughed without any humor. "The Fair Folk don't help humans."

"Shadowhunters are not human," Eddie said. "Not really."

"We are not much better to them," said Ben.

"They can't be worse than vampires," Stan muttered.

"Faeries," Ben went on. "are the offspring of demons and angels, with the beauty of angels and the viciousness of demons. A vampire might attack you, if you entered its domain, but a faerie could make you dance until you died with your legs ground down into stumps, trick you into a midnight swim and drag you screaming underwater until your lungs burst, fill your eyes with faerie dust until you gouged them out at the roots—"

"Ben!" Beverly snapped, cutting him off mid-rant. "Shut up. Jesus. That's enough."

"Look, it's easy to outsmart a werewolf or a vampire," Ben said. "They're no smarter than anyone else. But faeries live for hundreds of years and they're as cunning as snakes. They can't lie, but they love to engage in creative truth-telling. They'll find out whatever it is you want most in the world and give it to you—with a sting in the tail of the gift that will make you regret you ever wanted it in the first place." He sighed. "They're not really about helping people. More about harm disguised as help."

"And you don't think we're smart enough to know the difference?" asked Stan.

"I didn't say it, you did."

Beverly glared at him. "I don't see that it matters what you think we should do," she said. "Considering that you can't go with us in the first place. You can't go anywhere."

Bill swallowed. "W-we're going," he said. He spoke the words like an apology. "Ben—a r-request from the Seelie Court—it would be stupid to ignore it. B-besides, Richie's probably already told them we're coming."

"I don't want to stay here and do nothing." Ben said.

"As much as I love this chit-chat," Eleven said, flipping her long sleeves back, "There is a way."

"What other way? This is a directive from the Clave. I can't just weasel out of it."

"But I can." Eleven grinned. "Never doubt my weaseling abilities, Shadowhunter, for they are epic and memorable in their scope. I specifically enchanted the contract with the Inquisitor so that I could let you go for a short time if I desired, as long as you are accompanied."

"Richie w-will meet us in the park at Turtle Pond." Bill said.

"And one last thing," Eleven said, jabbing a ringed finger at Ben. "Try not to get yourself killed in the Seelie Court. If you die, I'll have a lot of explaining to do."

Thick tendrils of moss and plants surrounded the rim of Turtle Pond like a bordering of green lace. The surface of the water was still, rippled here and there in the wake of drifting ducks, or dimpled by the silvery flick of a fish's tail.

There was a small wooden gazebo built out over the water; Richie was sitting in it, staring out across the lake. His showed that he was deep in concentration.

"Richie," said Ben, as they neared the pond, and he jumped up and spun around. His smile was dazzling.

"Ben!" He went and hugged Ben like any brother would do. He had Ben's whip on his hand, and handed it to him. "Thought you might want this back."

Ben's face was pure relief and surprise. "Thanks, Richie. I owe you one."

"You owe me at least one hundreds." Watching Richie hug Ben, Eddie tried to school his features into a happy and loving expression.

"Are you all right?" Stan asked Eddie, with some concern. "Your eyes are crossing."

"I'm fine." Eddie lied.

"Are you sure? You looked sort of... *contorted*."

"Something I ate."

Richie looked over at Eddie and his expression changed, it wasn't the typical smug smile he had always, it was different. "How did you get Eleven to let Ben leave?"

"Just for a few hours." Ben said.

Richie looked dubious. "Sharon won't be pleased if she finds out."

"That you freed a possible criminal from a witch who dresses as if she were in a Tim Burton movie?"

Richie looked at him thoughtfully. "Is there some particular reason that you're here? I'm not so sure we should be bringing you to the Seelie Court. They hate mundanes."

Stan rolled his eyes upward. "Not this again."

"Not what again?" said Eddie.

"Every time I annoy him, he retreats into his No Mundanes Allowed tree house." Stan pointed at Richie. "Let me remind you, the last time you wanted to leave me behind, I saved all your lives."

"Sure," said Richie. "One time—"

"The f-faerie courts *are* dangerous," cut in Bill. "Even y-your skill with the bow won't help you. It's not that kind of d-danger."

"I can take care of myself," said Stan. A sharp wind had come up. It blew drying leaves across the gravel at their feet and made Stan shiver. He dug his hands into the wool-lined pockets of his jacket.

"You don't have to come," Beverly said.

He looked at her, a steady, measured look. "Yeah, I do."

Richie made a noise under his breath. "Then I suppose we're ready," he said. "Don't expect any special consideration, mundane."

"Look on the bright side," said Stan. "If they need a human sacrifice, you can always offer me. I'm not sure the rest of you qualify anyway."

Richie brightened. "It's always nice when someone volunteers to be the first up against the wall."

"Let's just go." Ben said.

Eddie glanced around. The sun had set completely and the moon was up, a wedge of creamy white casting its reflection onto the pond. It wasn't quite full, but shadowed at one edge, giving it the look of a half-lidded eye. Night wind rattled the tree branches, knocking them against one another with a sound like hollow bones.

"Where do we go?" Eddie asked. "Where's the door?"

Richie's smile was like a whispered secret. "Follow me."

He moved down to the edge of the water, his boots leaving deep impressions in the wet mud. Eddie followed. Stan, behind him, swore as he slipped in the mud; Richie moved automatically to steady him as they all turned. Stan jerked his arm back. "I don't need your help."

"Stop it." Ben tapped a booted foot in the shallow water at the lake's edge. "Both of you. In fact, all of you. If we don't stick together in the Seelie Court, we're dead."

"But I wasn't-" Beverly started.

"Also," Richie added sternly, "for the love of the Angel, *don't* eat or drink anything while we're underground, any of you. Okay?"

"Underground?" said Beverly worriedly. "Nobody said anything about underground."

Richie threw up his hands and splashed out into the pond. His black coat swirled out around him like an enormous lily pad. "Come on. We only have until the moon moves."

The moon *what*? Shaking his head, Eddie stepped out into the pond. The water was shallow and clear; in the bright starlight, he could see the black shapes of tiny darting fish moving past his ankles. He gritted his teeth as he waded farther out into the pond. The cold was intense.

Behind him, Ben moved out into the water with a contained grace that barely rippled the surface. Stan, behind him, was splashing and cursing. Beverly was also splashing but didn't say a word. Bill was following Ben with delicacy. Richie, having reached the center of the pond, paused there, up to his rib cage in water. He held out his hand toward Eddie. "Stop."

Eddie stopped. Just in front of him, the reflection of the moon glimmered atop the water like a huge silvery dinner plate. Some part of him knew that it didn't work like this; the moon was supposed to move away from you as you approached, ever receding. But here it was, hovering just on the surface of the water as if it were anchored in place.

"Ben, you go first," Richie said, and beckoned him. "Come on."

He brushed past Eddie, smelling of wet leather and char. Ben stepped backward into the reflection of the moon—and vanished.

"Okay," said Stan unhappily. "Okay, that was weird."

Eddie glanced back at him. He was only hip-deep in water, but he was shivering, his hands hugging his elbows. Eddie took a step backward, feeling a shock of icier cold when he moved into the

shimmering silver reflection. He teetered for a moment, as if he'd lost his balance on the highest rung of a ladder—and then fell backward into darkness as the moon swallowed him up.

11. The Seelie Court

Eddie hit packed earth, stumbled, and felt a hand on his arm, steadying him. It was Richie. "Easy does it," he said, and let him go.

Eddie was soaking wet, rivulets of cold water running down the back of his shirt, his hair clinging to his forehead. His drenched clothes felt as if they weighed a ton.

They were in a hollowed-out dirt corridor, illuminated by faintly glowing moss. A tangle of dangling vines formed a curtain at one end of the corridor and long, hairy tendrils hung like dead snakes from the ceiling. Tree roots, Eddie realized. They were underground. And it was cold down here, cold enough to make his breath puff out in an icy mist when he exhaled.

"Cold?" Richie was soaking wet too, his dark hair stuck to his cheeks and forehead. Water ran from his pants and coat, and made the white shirt he was wearing transparent. Eddie could see the dark lines of his permanent Marks through it.

He looked away quickly. "I'm fine."

"That was awful," Ben appeared behind Eddie, wet too, and an angry look on his face. Bill appeared seconds later, falling to the ground, hard.

"Oh, sh-shit." Bill rubbed his arm.

A dark shape hurtled by, just out of the corner of Eddie's eye, and hit the ground with a thud. It was Stan, also soaking wet. "Are you okay?" Eddie asked him.

"Never better." Stan said, but then he coughed, cutting off his sarcastic comment.

Eddie could feel Richie watching them, feel his gaze like a weight on his shoulders. Stan stood up with a frown, just as Beverly dropped out of the heavens, landing gracefully on her feet. Water ran from hair and weighed down her blue jacket but she barely seemed to

notice. "Oooh, that was fun."

"That does it," said Stan. "I'm going to get you a dictionary for Christmas this year."

"Why?" Beverly said.

"So you can look up 'fun.' I'm not sure you know what it means."

Ben glanced around. "Now what? Which way do we go?"

"Neither way," said Richie. "We wait here, and they come and get us."

Eddie was not impressed by this suggestion. "How do they know we're here? Is there a doorbell we have to ring or something?"

"The Court knows all that happens in their lands. Our presence won't go unnoticed."

Stan looked at him with suspicion. "And how do you know so much about faeries and the Seelie Court, anyway?"

Richie didn't answer. A moment later the curtain of vines was drawn aside and a faerie stepped through it, shaking back his long hair. Eddie had seen some of the fey before at Eleven's party and had been struck by both their cold beauty and a certain wild unearthliness they possessed even when they were dancing and drinking. This faerie was no exception: His hair fell in blue-black sheets around a cool, sharp, lovely face; his eyes were green as vines or moss and there was the shape of a leaf, either a birthmark or tattoo, across one of his cheekbones. He wore an armor of a silvery brown like the bark of trees in winter, and when he moved, the armor flashed a multitude of colors: peat black, moss green, ash gray, sky blue.

Richie immediately hugged him. "Meliorn!"

"Ah," said Stan, quietly and not without amusement, "so that's how he knows."

"This is not a time for affection," Meliorn said. "The Queen of the Seelie Court has requested an audience with the four Nephilim among you. Will you come?"

Eddie gestured Stan and Beverly. "What about our friends?"

Meliorn looked impassive. "Downworlders are accepted. Humans are not permitted in the Court."

"I wish someone had mentioned that earlier," said Stan, to no one in particular. "I take it I'm just supposed to wait out here until vines start growing on me?"

Meliorn considered. "That might offer significant amusement."

"Stan's not an ordinary mundane. He can be trusted," Richie said, startling them all, and Stan more than the rest. Eddie could tell Stan was surprised because he stared at Richie without offering a single smart remark. "He has fought many battles with us."

"By which you mean one battle," muttered Stan.

"We will not enter the Seelie Court without Stan," Beverly said, her hand on Stan's shoulder. "Your Queen requested this audience with us, remember? It wasn't our idea to come here."

There was a spark of dark amusement in Meliorn's green eyes. "As you wish," he said. "Let it not be said that the Seelie Court does not respect the desires of its guests." He spun on a perfectly booted heel and began to lead them down the corridor without pausing to see if they were following him.

"Do you think he and Richie..." Eddie whispered to Ben, without even thinking twice.

Ben frowned. "Does it matter?"

"I guess not," Eddie answered. "I just..."

"I told you, Richie has been with many people, I don't think they were something serious."

"Oh, okay."

"You sound like you're jealous." Ben pushed a tree root aside. They had moved from a dirt-walled corridor to one lined with smooth

stones, only the occasional root snaking down between the stones from above. The floor was some kind of polished hard stuff, not marble but stone veined and flaked with lines of shimmering material like powdered jewels.

"I'm not."

"Come," the faerie knight said. "The Queen will be growing impatient." He headed down the corridor without giving Richie a second glance.

"They seem like really serious people." Beverly said to no one in particular.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," said Richie. "There's a pixie nightclub downtown called Hot Wings. Not," he added, "that I have ever been there."

Stan looked at Richie, opened his mouth as if he intended to ask him a question, then seemed to think better of it. He closed his mouth with a snap just as the corridor opened out into a wide room whose floor was packed dirt and whose walls were lined with high stone pillars twined all over with vines and bright flowers bursting with color. Thin cloths were hung between the pillars, dyed a soft blue that was almost the exact hue of the sky. The room was filled with light, though Eddie could see no torches, and the overall effect was of a summer pavilion in bright sunshine rather than a dirt and stone room underground.

There was a strange sweet music playing, flawed with sweet-sour notes, a sort of aural equivalent of honey mixed with lemon juice, and there was a circle of faeries dancing to the music, their feet barely seeming to skim the floor. Their hair—blue, black, brown and scarlet, metal gold and ice white—flew like banners.

Eddie could see why they were called the Fair Folk, for they were fair indeed with their pale lovely faces, their wings of lilac and gold and blue—how could he have believed Ben that they meant harm? The music that had jarred his ears at first now sounded only sweet. He felt the urge to move his own feet in the dance. The music told him that if he did that, he too would be so light that his feet would barely

touch the earth. He took a step forward— And was jerked back by a hand on his arm.

Richie was glaring at him, his golden eyes bright as a cat's. "If you dance with them," he said in a low voice, "you'll dance until you die."

Eddie felt as if he'd been pulled out of a dream, groggy and half-awake. His voice slurred when he spoke. "Whaaat?"

Richie made an impatient noise. He had his stele in his hand; he hadn't seen him take it out. He gripped his wrist and inscribed a quick, stinging Mark onto the skin of his inner arm. "Now look."

Eddie looked again—and froze. The faces that had seemed so lovely to him were *still* lovely, yet behind them lurked something vulpine, almost feral. The girl with the pink and blue wings beckoned, and Eddie saw that her fingers were made of twigs, budded with closed leaves. Her eyes were entirely black, without iris or pupil. The boy dancing next to her had poison green skin and curling horns twisting from his temples. When he turned in the dance, his coat fell open and Eddie saw that beneath it, his chest was an empty rib cage. Ribbons were woven through his bare rib bones, possibly to make him look more festive. Eddie's stomach lurched.

"Come on." Richie pushed him and Eddie stumbled forward.

Skirting the circle of dancers, they made their way to the far end of the room and through a parted curtain of blue silk. It was a relief to be out of the room and into another corridor, this one carved from a glossy brown material like the outside of a nut. Beverly, who was holding Stan, let go of him and he stopped walking immediately; when Eddie caught up to him, he saw that this was because Beverly had tied her scarf across his eyes. He was fiddling with the knot when Eddie reached him. "Let me get it," he said, and he went still while he untied him and handed the scarf back to Beverly with a nod of thanks.

Stan pushed his hair back; it was damp where the scarf had held it down. "That was some music," he observed. "A little bit country, a little bit rock and roll."

Meliorn, who had paused to wait for them, frowned. "You didn't care for it?"

"I cared for it a little too much," Eddie said. "What was that supposed to be, some kind of test? Or a joke?"

He shrugged. "I am used to mortals who are easily swayed by our faerie glammers; not so the Nephilim. I thought you had protections."

"He does," Richie said, meeting Meliorn's jade green gaze with his own. Meliorn only shrugged and began walking again.

Stan kept pace beside Eddie for a few moments without speaking before he said, "So what did I miss? Naked dancing ladies?"

Eddie thought of the male faerie's torn-open ribs and shuddered. "Nothing that pleasant."

Beverly shot a glance at Meliorn, who had reached a leafy screen set into the wall and paused there. "These are the Queen's chambers," he said. "She's come from her Court in the north to see about the child's death. If there's to be war, she wants to be the one declaring it."

Up close, Eddie could see that the screen was made of thickly woven vines, budded with amber droplets. He drew the vines apart and ushered them into the chamber on the other side. Richie ducked through first, followed by Eddie. He straightened up, looking around curiously.

The room itself was plain, the earthen walls hung with pale fabric. Will-o'-the-wisps glowed in glass jars. A lovely woman reclined on a low couch surrounded by what must have been her courtiers—a motley assortment of faeries, from tiny sprites to what looked like lovely human girls with long hair... if you discounted their black, pupil-less eyes.

"My Queen," said Meliorn, bowing low. "I have brought the Nephilim to you."

The Queen sat up straight. She had long scarlet hair that seemed to float around her like autumn leaves in a breeze. Her eyes were clear blue as glass, her gaze sharp as a razor. "Four of these are Nephilim,"

she said. "There's a warlock, and a *mundane*."

Meliorn seemed to shrink back, but the Queen didn't even look at him. Her gaze was on the Shadowhunters. Eddie could feel the weight of it, like a touch. Despite her loveliness, there was nothing fragile about the Queen. She was as bright and hard to look at as a burning star.

"Our apologies, my lady." Richie stepped forward, putting himself between the Queen and his companions. His voice had changed its tone—there was something in the way he spoke now, something careful and delicate. "The warlock means no harm. And the mundane is our responsibility. We owe him protection. Therefore we keep him with us."

The Queen tilted her head to the side, like an interested bird. All her attention was on Richie now. "A blood debt?" she murmured. "To a mundane?"

"He saved my life," Richie said. Eddie felt Stan stiffen in surprise. Faeries couldn't lie, Richie had said, and Richie wasn't lying, either—Stan *had* saved his life. That just wasn't why they'd brought him with them. Eddie began to appreciate what Richie had meant by creative truth-telling.

"Please, my lady." Ben said, almost kneeling down. "We had hoped you would understand. We had heard you were as kind as you were beautiful, and in that case—well," he said, "your kindness must be extreme indeed."

The Queen smirked and leaned forward, gleaming hair falling to shadow her face. "You are as charming as your father, Jonathan Gray," she said, and gestured at the cushions scattered around the floor. "Come, sit beside me. Eat something. Drink. Rest yourselves. Talk is better with wet lips."

For a moment Ben looked thrown. He hesitated. Meliorn leaned over to him and spoke softly. "It would be unwise to refuse the bounty of the Queen of the Seelie Court."

Richie's eyes flicked toward him. Then he shrugged. "It won't hurt us

just to sit down."

Meliorn led them over to a pile of silky cushions near the Queen's divan. Eddie sat down cautiously, half-expecting there to be some kind of big sharp root just waiting to poke him in the behind. It seemed like the sort of thing the Queen would find amusing. But nothing happened. The cushions were very comfortable; she settled back with the others around him.

A pixie with bluish skin came toward them carrying a platter with four silver cups on it. They each took a cup of the gold-toned liquid. There were rose petals floating on the top.

The drink had a heady, intoxicating scent, richer and more delicious than roses. Eddie picked a petal out of the liquid and crushed it between his thumb and forefinger, releasing more of the scent. Richie jostled his arm. "Don't drink any of it," he said under his breath.

"But—"

"Just don't."

He set the cup down, His finger and thumb were stained pink.

"Now," said the Queen. "Meliorn tells me you claim to know who killed our child in the park last night. Though I tell you now, it seems no mystery to me. A faerie child, drained of blood? Is it that you bring me the name of a single vampire? But all vampires are at fault here, for the breaking of the Law, and should be punished accordingly. Despite what may seem, we are not such a particular people."

Bill joined the conversation. "W-we're almost certain that the murderer is someone else. We think he m-may be trying to throw suspicion on the vampires to shield himself."

"Have you proof of that?"

Ben interrupted before Bill could answer. "Last night the Silent Brothers were slaughtered as well, and none of them were drained of blood."

"And this has to do with our child, how? Dead Nephilim are a tragedy to Nephilim, but nothing to me."

Eddie felt a sharp sting at his left hand. Looking down, he saw the tiny shape of a sprite darting away between the pillows. A red bead of blood had risen on his finger. He put the finger into his mouth with a wince. The sprites were cute, but they had a mean bite.

"The Soul-Sword was stolen as well," said Ben. "You know of Maellartach?"

"The sword that makes Shadowhunters tell the truth," said the Queen, with dark amusement. "We fey have no need of such an object."

"It was taken by Bob Gray," said Ben. "He killed the Silent Brothers to get it, and we think he killed the faerie as well. He needed the blood of a faerie child to effect a transformation on the Sword. To make it a tool he could use."

"And he won't stop," Richie added. "He needs more blood after that."

The Queen's high eyebrows were arched even higher. "More blood of the Folk?"

"No," Ben said, shooting a look at Richie that Eddie couldn't quite interpret. "More Downworlder blood. He needs the blood of a werewolf, and a vampire—"

The Queen's eyes shone with reflected light. "That seems hardly our concern."

"He killed one of *yours*," Richie said. "Don't you want revenge?"

The Queen's gaze brushed her like a moth's wing. "Not immediately," she said. "We are a patient folk, for we have all the time in the world. Bob Gray is an old enemy of ours—but we have enemies older still. We are content to wait and watch."

"He's summoning demons to him," Ben said. "Creating an army—"

"Demons," said the Queen lightly, as her courtiers chattered behind her. "Demons are your charge, are they not, Shadowhunter? Is that

not why you hold authority over us all? Because you are the ones who slay demons?"

"I'm not here to give you orders on behalf of the Clave. We came when you asked us because we thought that if you knew the truth, you'd help us."

"Is that what you thought?" The Queen sat forward in her chair, her long hair rippling and alive. "Remember, Shadowhunter, there are those of us who chafe under the rule of the Clave. Perhaps we are tired of fighting your wars for you."

"But it isn't our war alone," said Ben. "Bob hates Downworlders more than he hates demons. If he defeats us, he'll go after you next."

The Queen's eyes bored into him.

"And when he does," said Ben, "remember that it was a Shadowhunter who warned you what was coming."

There was silence. Even the Court had fallen silent, watching their Lady. At last, the Queen leaned back on her cushions and took a swallow from a silver chalice. "Warning me about your own parent," she said. "I had thought you mortals capable of filial affection, at least, and yet you seem to feel no loyalty toward Bob your father."

Ben said nothing. He seemed, for a change, lost for words.

Sweetly, the Queen went on, "Or perhaps this hostility of yours is the pretense. Love does make liars out of your kind."

"But we don't love our father," said Eddie, as Ben remained frighteningly silent. "We hate him."

"Do you?" The Queen looked almost bored.

"You know how the bonds of family are, my lady," said Ben, recovering his voice. "They cling as tightly as vines. And sometimes, like vines, they cling tightly enough to kill."

The Queen's lashes fluttered. "You would betray your own father for the sake of the Clave?"

"Even so, Lady."

She laughed, a sound as bright and cold as icicles. "Who would have thought," she said, "that Bob's little experiments would turn on him?"

Eddie looked at Ben, but he could see by the expression on his face that he had no idea what the Queen meant. It was Richie who spoke. "*Experiments?*"

The Queen didn't even glance at him. Her gaze, a luminous blue, was fixed on Ben. "The Fair Folk are a people of secrets," she said. "Our own, and others'. Ask your father, when next you see him, what blood runs in your veins, Jonathan."

"I hadn't planned on asking him anything next time I see him," Ben said. "But if you desire it, my lady, it will be done."

The Queen's lips curved into a smile. "I think you are a liar. But what a charming one. Charming enough that I will swear you this: Ask your father that question, and I will promise you what aid is in my power, should you strike against Bob."

Ben smiled. "Your generosity is as remarkable as your loveliness, Lady." Eddie made a gagging noise, but the Queen looked pleased. "And I think we're done here now," Ben added, rising from the cushions. He'd set his untouched drink down earlier, beside Richie's. They all rose after him.

"A moment." The Queen rose. "One of you must remain."

Ben paused halfway to the door, and turned to face her. "What do you mean?"

She stretched out one hand to indicate Eddie. "Once our food or drink passes mortal lips, the mortal is ours. You know that, Shadowhunter."

Eddie was stunned. "But I didn't drink any of it!" He turned to Richie. "She's lying."

"Faeries don't lie," he said, confusion and dawning anxiety chasing each other across his face. He turned back to the Queen. "I'm afraid you're mistaken, Lady."

Stan and Beverly were staring now. Eddie glanced down at his hand. "Of blood," he said. "One of the sprites bit my finger—it was bleeding —" He remembered the sweet taste of the blood, mixed with the juice on his finger. Panicked, he moved toward the vine door, and stopped as what felt like invisible hands shoved him back into the room. He turned to Richie, stricken. "It's true."

Richie's face was flushed. "I suppose I should have expected a trick like that," he said to the Queen, his previous flirtatiousness gone. "Why are you doing this? What do you want from us?"

The Queen's voice was soft as spider's fur. "Perhaps I am only curious," she said. "It is not often I have young Shadowhunters so close within my purview. Like us, you trace your ancestry to heaven; that intrigues me."

"But unlike you," said Richie, "there is nothing of hell in us."

"You are mortal; you age; you die," the Queen said dismissively. "If that is not hell, pray tell me, what is?"

"If you just want to study a Shadowhunter, I won't be much use to you," Eddie cut in. His hand ached where the sprite had bitten it, and he fought the urge to scream or burst into tears. "I don't know anything about Shadowhunting. I hardly have any training. I'm the wrong person to pick." *On*, he added silently.

For the first time the Queen looked directly at him. Eddie wanted to shrink back. "In truth, Edward Gray, you are precisely the right person." Her eyes gleamed as she took in Eddie's discomfiture. "Thanks to the changes your father worked in you, you are not like other Shadowhunters. Your gifts are different."

"My gifts?" Eddie was bewildered.

"Yours is the gift of words that cannot be spoken," the Queen said to him, "and your brother's is the Angel's own gift. Your father made sure of it, when your brother was a child and before you were ever born."

"My father never gave me anything," Eddie said. "He didn't even give

me a name."

Ben looked as blank as Eddie felt. "While the Fair Folk do not lie," he said, "they can be lied *to*. I think you have been the victim of a trick or joke, my lady. There is nothing special about myself or my brother."

"How deftly you downplay your charms," said the Queen with a laugh. "Though you must know you are not of the usual sort of human boy, Jonathan..." She looked from Eddie to Ben to Richie—Richie closed his mouth, which had been wide open, with a snap—and back at Ben again. "Could it be that you do not know?" she murmured.

"I know that I will not leave my brother here in your Court," said Ben, "and since there is nothing to be learned from either him or myself, perhaps you could do us the favor of releasing him? "Now that you've had your fun?" his eyes said, though his voice was polite and cool as water.

The Queen's smile was wide and terrible. "What if I told you he could be freed by a kiss?"

"You want me to kiss you?" Eddie said, bewildered.

The Queen burst out laughing, and immediately, the courtiers copied her mirth. The laughter was a bizarre and inhuman mix of hoots, squeaks, and cackles, like the high shrieking of animals in pain.

"That kiss won't free you, dear."

The six looked at each other, startled. "I'm not kissing *any* of you," Beverly threw up her hands. "Just so it's official."

"No," said the Queen, in a voice like tinkling crystal. "That is not what I want either."

Beverly rolled her eyes. "Oh, for God's sake. Look, if there's no other way of getting out of this, I'll kiss Stan. I've done it before, it wasn't that bad."

"We were *drunk*." Stan clarified, though Eddie didn't know to who.

"Alas," said the Queen of the Seelie Court. Her expression was sharp with a sort of cruel delight, and Eddie wondered if it weren't a kiss she wanted so much as simply to watch them all squirm in discomfort. "I'm afraid that won't do either."

"Well, I'm n-not kissing the mundane," said Bill. "I'd r-rather stay down here and rot."

"Forever?" said Stan. "Forever's an awfully long time."

Richie raised his eyebrows. "I knew it," he said. "You want to kiss him, don't you?"

Stan threw up his hands in exasperation. "Of course not. But if—"

"I guess it's true what they say," observed Richie. "There are no straight men in the trenches."

"That's *atheists*, jackass," said Stan furiously. "There are no *atheists* in the trenches."

"While this is all very amusing," said the Queen coolly, leaning forward, "the kiss that will free the boy is the kiss that he most desires." The cruel delight in her face and voice had sharpened, and her words seemed to stab into Eddie's ears like needles. "Only that and nothing more."

"Why are you doing this?" Richie demanded.

"I rather thought I was offering *you* a boon."

Richie flushed, but said nothing. He avoided looking at Eddie.

Stan said, "That's ridiculous. Eddie is not in love with Richie."

The Queen shrugged, a delicate twitch of her shoulders. "You can fool yourself, but not me. If Edward doesn't desire his kiss, he won't be free."

Stan said something angrily, but Eddie didn't hear him: His ears were buzzing, as if a swarm of angry bees were trapped inside his head. Stan whirled around, looking furious, and said, "You don't have to do

this, Eddie, it's a trick—"

"Not a trick," said Richie. "A test."

"Well, I don't know about you, Stan," said Beverly, her voice edged. "But I'd like to get Eddie out of here."

"Like you'd kiss Richie," Stan said, "just because the Queen of the Seelie Court asked you to?"

"Sure I would." Beverly sounded annoyed. "If the other option was being stuck in the Seelie Court forever? Who cares, anyway? It's just a kiss."

"That's right." It was Richie. Eddie saw him, at the blurred edge of his vision, as he moved toward him and put a hand on his shoulder. "It's just a kiss," Richie said, and though his tone was harsh, his hands were inexplicably gentle. Eddie looked up at him. His eyes were very dark, perhaps because it was so dim down here in the Court, perhaps because of something else. Eddie could see his reflection in each of Richie's dilated pupils, a tiny image of himself inside his eyes.

Eddie shut his eyelids. He could feel the dank heaviness of his clothes, cold and itchy against his skin, and the cloying sweet air of the cave, colder yet, and the weight of Richie's hands on his shoulders, the only things that were warm. And then Richie kissed him. He felt the brush of his lips, light at first, and his own opened automatically beneath the pressure. Almost against his will he felt himself go fluid and pliant, stretching upward to twine his arms around Richie's neck the way that a sunflower twists toward light. His hands were knotting in Eddie's hair, and the kiss stopped being gentle and became fierce, all in a single moment like tinder flaring into a blaze. Eddie heard a sound like a sigh rush through the Court, all around them, a wave of noise, but it meant nothing, was lost in the rush of his blood through his veins, the dizzying sense of weightlessness in his body.

Richie's hands moved from Eddie's hair, slid down his spine; Eddie felt the hard press of his palms against his shoulder blades—and then Richie pulled away, gently disengaging himself, drawing his hands away from his neck and stepping back. For a moment Eddie thought

he might fall; he felt as if something essential had been torn away from him, an arm or a leg, and he stared at Richie in blank astonishment—what did he feel, did he feel nothing? Eddie didn't think he could bear it if he felt nothing. Richie looked back at him. He held the gaze for a split second, then looked away from Eddie, the muscles in his throat working. His hands were clenched into fists at his sides. "Was that good enough?" he called, turning to face the Queen and the courtiers behind her. "Did that entertain you?"

The Queen had a hand across her mouth, half-covering a smile. "We are quite entertained," she said. "But not, I think, so much as the both of you."

"I can only assume," said Richie, "that mortal emotions amuse you because you have none of your own."

The smile slipped from her mouth at that.

"Easy, Richie," said Bill. He turned to Eddie. "C-can you leave now? Are you free?"

Eddie went to the door and was not surprised to find no resistance barring his way. He stood with his hand among the vines and turned to Stan. He was staring at Eddie as if he'd never seen him before.

"We should go," Eddie said. "Before it's too late."

"It's already too late."

Meliorn led them from the Seelie Court and deposited them back in the park, all without speaking a single word. Eddie thought his back looked stiff and disapproving. He turned away after they'd splashed out of the pond, without even a good-bye for Richie, and disappeared back into the wavering reflection of the moon.

Richie made a sound like a choked laugh and flipped the collar of his wet jacket up. They were all shivering. The cold night smelled like dirt and plants and human modernity—Eddie almost thought he could scent the iron on the air. The ring of city surrounding the park sparked with fierce lights: ice blue, cool green, hot red, and the pond

lapped quietly against its dirt shores. The moon's reflection had moved to the pond's far edge and quivered there as if it were afraid of them.

"We'd better get back." Ben drew his jacket around his shoulders. "Before we freeze to death."

"It's going to take forever to get back to Brooklyn," Beverly said. "Maybe we should take a taxi."

"Or we could just g-go to the Institute," suggested Bill. "No one's there anyway—they're all in the Bone City, looking for c-clues. It'll just take a second to stop by and grab your clothes, change into s-something dry. It's still y-your home, Ben."

Eddie hesitated. "I don't know. I might just grab a cab back with Stan and Bev."

Maybe if they spent a little time alone together, he could explain to Stan what had happened down in the Seelie Court, and that it wasn't what he thought. Richie had been examining his watch for water damage. Now he looked at Eddie, eyebrows raised. "That might be a little difficult," he said, "seeing that he left already."

"He *what*?" Eddie whirled around and stared. Stan was gone; the five of them were alone by the pond. Eddie ran a little way up the hill and shouted his name. In the distance, he could just see him, striding purposefully away along the concrete path that led out of the park and onto the avenue. He called out to him again, but Stan didn't turn around.

12. Because the Night

Bill had been telling the truth : The Institute was entirely deserted. Almost entirely, anyway. Georgie was asleep on the red couch in the foyer when they came in. His glasses were slightly askew and he clearly hadn't meant to fall asleep: There was a book open on the floor where he'd dropped it and his sneakered feet dangled over the couch's edge in a manner that looked as if it were probably uncomfortable.

Eddie's heart went out to him immediately. He reminded him of Stan at the age of nine or ten, all glasses and awkward blinking and ears .

"*Who* is that?" Beverly whispered to no one in particular.

"Our little brother Georgie." Richie said. "Georgie is like a cat. He can sleep anywhere." He reached down and plucked the glasses from Georgie's face, setting them down on a squat inlaid table nearby. There was a look on his face Eddie had never seen before—a fierce protective gentleness.

"Oh, leave his stuff alone—you'll just get mud on it," said Ben crossly, unbuttoning his wet jacket. Her shirt clung to his long torso and water darkened the thick leather belt around his waist. The glitter of his coiled whip was just visible where the handle protruded from the edge of the belt. He was frowning. "I can feel a cold coming on," he said. "I'm going to take a shower."

"M-me too." Said Bill, before running off with such quickness that made Eddie blink in surprise.

As Ben was leaving, he turned his head lightly. "You coming, Beverly?"

Beverly frowned. "Why would I go with you?" Then she sneezed, covering her nose with her arm.

Ben rolled his eyes. "Out of the three of us, my clothes are closest to your size. But if you want to get a cold..."

"Fine." Beverly huffed and followed him. "But *I'm* taking the shower first." They both disappeared down the long corridor before Eddie could hear Ben's response.

Richie shrugged off his wet coat and hung it on the peg next to Ben's. "Ben's right about the hot shower. I could certainly use one."

"I don't have anything to change into," Eddie said, suddenly wanting a few moments to himself. His fingers itched to dial Stan's number on his cell phone, find out if he was all right. "I'll just wait for you here."

"Don't be stupid. I'll lend you a T-shirt." His jeans were soaked and hung low on his hipbones, showing a strip of pale, tattooed skin between the denim and the edge of his T-shirt.

Eddie looked away. "I don't think—"

"Come on." His tone was firm.

Surreptitiously, Eddie checked the screen on his phone as he followed Richie down the hall to his room. Stan hadn't tried to call. Ice seemed to crystallize inside his chest.

Richie's room was just as he remembered it: neat as a pin and bare as a monk's cell. There was nothing about the room that told you anything about Richie: no posters on the walls, no books stacked on the night table. Even the duvet on the bed was plain white.

He went to the dresser and pulled a folded long-sleeved blue T-shirt out of a drawer. He tossed it to Eddie. "That one shrank in the wash," he said. "It'll probably still be big on you, but..." He shrugged. "I'm going to shower. Yell if you need anything."

Eddie nodded, holding the shirt across his chest as if it were a shield. Richie looked as if he were about to say something else, but apparently thought better of it; with another shrug, he disappeared into the bathroom, closing the door firmly behind him.

Beverly sank down onto the bed, Ben's black shirt fitted her almost

perfectly, but she could still feel the pants a little loose on the hips.

She pulled her phone out of her pocket. She dialed Stan's number. After four rings, it went to voice mail. "Hi, you've reached Stan. Either I'm away from the phone or I'm avoiding you. Leave me a message and—"

"What are you doing?"

Ben stood in the open doorway of the bathroom. Water ran loudly in the shower behind him and the bathroom was half full of steam. He was shirtless and barefoot, damp jeans riding low on his hips, showing the deep indentations above his hipbones, as if someone had pressed their fingers there.

Beverly dropped the phone onto the bed. "Nothing. Checking the time."

"There's a clock next to the bed," Ben pointed out. "You were calling the mundane, weren't you?"

"His name is *Stan*." Beverly snapped. "And you don't have to be such a jerk about him too. He's helped you out more than once."

Ben's eyes were lidded, thoughtful. The bathroom was rapidly filling with steam, making his hair curl more. He said, "And now you feel guilty because he's run off. You shouldn't be. I think he's only angry with Eddie."

"Did you know about it? Eddie and Richie?"

"I had a feeling there was something *there*, but I wasn't too sure." The water kept flowing. "I had never seen Richie like that, with anyone."

"Me neither, with Eddie." Beverly stood up, hands on her face. "This is so messed up."

"It is, but maybe something good will come out of it."

"Something like what?"

"I don't know." Ben shook his head, then he stared at Beverly, as if

she was studying her. "You don't have a Mark."

"A what?"

"A Mark. All warlocks have some attribute that marks them as warlocks. Wings, hooves, taloned hands, or cat eyes, like Eleven. Didn't she tell you any of this?"

Beverly shook her head, confused. "No. I don't have anything out of the ordinary. Is that bad?"

"It's definitely weird." Ben stroked his chin.

"What do you think it means?"

"It means that you're a special little warlock." Ben approached her and ruffled her hair, leaving little drops falling on the bed.

"You're wasting water right now." Beverly observed.

Ben looked taken aback. "Oh, right." He immediately went to the bathroom and closed the door after him.

"Hi, you've reached Stan. Either I'm away from the phone or I'm avoiding you. Leave me a message and—"

"Damnit, Stan." Eddie whispered, dropping his phone on the bed.

"I wouldn't bother calling him. I'm sure he's avoiding you." Richie comed out of the bathroom, dressed in a red shirt and long black pants, Eddie guessed it was his pajamas.

Eddie didn't try to keep the anger out of his voice. "And you know this because you and he are so *close*?"

"I know it because I saw the look on his face before he took off," Richie said. "You didn't. You weren't looking at him. But I was."

Eddie raked his still-dank hair out of his eyes. His clothes itched where they clung to his skin, and he suspected he smelled like the

bottom of a pond, and he couldn't stop thinking about Stan. "It's your fault," he said suddenly, rage gathering around his heart. "You shouldn't have kissed me like that."

Richie had been leaning against the door frame; now he stood up straight. "How should I have kissed you? Is there another way you like it?"

"No." His hands trembled in his lap. They were cold, white, wrinkled by water. He laced his fingers together to stop the shaking. "Why did she make you kiss me? The Queen, I mean. Why force us to do—that? What pleasure could she possibly have gotten out of it?"

"You heard what the Queen said. She thought she was doing me a favor."

"That's not true."

"It is true. How many times do I have to tell you? The Fair Folk don't lie."

Eddie thought of what Ben had said back at Eleven's. *They'll find out whatever it is you want most in the world and give it to you—with a sting in the tail of the gift that will make you regret you ever wanted it in the first place.* "Then she was wrong."

"She wasn't wrong." Richie's tone was bitter. "She saw the way I looked at you, and you at me, and she played us like the instruments we are to her."

"I don't look at you," Eddie whispered.

"What?"

"I said, I don't *look* at you." Eddie released the hands that had been clasped together in his lap. There were red marks where his fingers had gripped each other. "At least I try not to."

Richie's eyes were narrowed, just a glint of gold showing through the lashes, and Eddie remembered the first time he had seen him and how he had reminded him of a lion, golden and deadly. "I don't believe you."

Eddie stood up. He couldn't meet his eyes, so instead he fixed his gaze on the thin scar on his shoulder, a memory of some old injury. *This life of scars and killing*, Keene had said once. *You have no part in it.* "Richie," he said. "Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because you're lying to me. And you're lying to yourself." Richie's eyes were blazing, and even though his hands were stuffed into his pockets, Eddie could see that they were knotted into fists.

"*What do you want me to tell you?* The truth? The truth is that I think I'm falling in love with you, but my friends would hate me because you're an asshole to everyone? Or do you have any ideas since you're so goddamned smart?"

Richie sucked a breath in, and Eddie realized he had never expected him to say what he'd just said, not in a million years. The look on his face said as much.

Eddie scrambled to regain his composure. "Richie I'm sorry, I didn't mean—"

"No. You're not sorry. Don't be sorry." Richie moved toward him, almost tripping over his feet—Richie, who never stumbled, never tripped over anything, never made an ungraceful move. His hands came up to cup Eddie's face; he felt the warmth of his fingertips, millimeters from his skin. Richie's voice shook. "I've never felt this way about anyone. I didn't think I could. I thought—"

"Richie. Don't."

"I thought that part of my heart was broken," he said, and there was a look on his face as he spoke as if he were surprised to hear himself saying these words, saying *my heart*. "Forever. But you—"

Eddie reached up and covered his hand with his own. "When I kissed you that second time, was because all of my fears disappeared. When I'm with you I'm never scared."

"So what changed?" There was desperation in his voice. "If we both feel the same way—"

"All of this! Look what happened with Stan, I don't want to keep

feeling guilty about you."

"If he doesn't like what makes you happy then he's not a real friend."

"What would you know about real friends? The only people you talk to are your brothers." Eddie's tone was harder than he meant it to.

"I..." Richie didn't finish, he looked down, Eddie had never seen him look down. His expression shut and locked like a door. It was hard to believe he'd ever looked at him another way. "I'm sorry I said anything, then." His voice was stiff, formal. "I won't be kissing you again. If that's what you want."

Eddie's heart did a slow, purposeless somersault as Richie moved away from him, plucked a towel off the top of the dresser, and headed back toward the bathroom. "But—Richie, what are you doing?"

"I'm taking another shower, I need to get rid of the *dirt*." He said before shutting the door.

Eddie collapsed onto the bed and stared up at the ceiling. It was as blank as Richie's face had been before he turned his back. Rolling over, he realized he was lying on top of Richie's blue shirt: It even smelled like him, like soap and smoke and coppery blood. Curling around it like he'd once curled around his favorite blanket when he was very small, Eddie closed his eyes.

In the dream, he looked down on shimmering water, spread out below him like an endless mirror that reflected the night sky. And like a mirror, it was solid and hard, and he could walk on it. He walked smelling night air and wet leaves and the smell of the city, glittering in the far distance like a faerie castle wreathed in lights—and where he walked, spiderwebbing cracks fissured out from his footsteps and slivers of glass splashed up like water.

The sky began to shine. It was alight with points of fire, like burning match tips. They fell, a rain of hot coals from the sky, and he cowered, throwing up his arms. One fell just in front of him, a hurtling bonfire, but

when it struck the ground it became a boy: It was Ben, all in burning gold with his gold eyes and gold skin, and white-gold wings sprouted from his back, wider and more thickly feathered than any bird's.

He smiled like a cat and pointed behind him, and Eddie turned to see that a dark-haired boy—was it Stan?—was standing there, and wings spread from his back as well, feathered black as midnight, and each feather was tipped with blood.

Eddie woke up gasping, his hands knotted in Richie's shirt. It was dark in the bedroom, ambient streetlight streaming from the one narrow window beside the bed. He sat up. His head felt heavy and the back of his neck ached. He scanned the room slowly and jumped as a bright pinpoint of light, like a cat's eyes in the darkness, shone out at him.

Ben was sitting in an armchair beside the bed. He was wearing jeans and a gray sweater and his hair looked nearly dry. He was holding something in his hand that gleamed like metal. A weapon? Though what he might be guarding against, here in the Institute, Eddie couldn't guess.

"Ben?" Eddie mumbled. "What are you doing here? Where's Richie?"

"He's sleeping in the couch. He couldn't wake you up, I guess." He lowered his voice. "I can't sleep, so I came here when I heard you talking in your sleep, something about wings and angels."

"Huh," Eddie rubbed his eyes. "It was a strange dream, maybe it was a nightmare."

"I have those too," Ben said. "About the Silent City."

Eddie felt around among the bedcovers until he located his phone and checked it again, though he knew what it would say. NO CALLS. "It's three in the morning," he noted with dismay. "Do you think Stan's all right?"

"I think he's weird, actually," said Ben. "Though that has little to do with the time."

Eddie shoved the phone into his jeans pocket. "I'm going to change."

Richie's white-painted bathroom was no bigger than Ben's, though it was considerably neater. There wasn't much variation among the rooms in the Institute, Eddie thought, closing the door behind him, but at least there was privacy.

He shucked off his wet shirt and hung it on the towel rack, splashed water over his face, and ran a comb through his messy hair. Richie's shirt was too big for him, but the material was soft against his skin.

He rolled the sleeves up and went back into the bedroom, where he found Ben sitting exactly where he had been before, staring moodily down at the glinting object in his hands. Eddie leaned on the back of the armchair. "What is that?"

Instead of answering, he turned it over so that he could see it properly. It was a jagged piece of broken glass, but instead of reflecting his own face, it held an image of green grass and blue sky and the bare black branches of trees.

"I didn't know you kept that," he said. "That piece of the Portal."

"It's why I wanted to come here," he said. "To get this." Longing and loathing were mixed in his voice. "I keep thinking maybe I'll see my father in a reflection. Figure out what he's up to."

"But he's not there, is he? I thought he was somewhere here. In the city."

Ben shook his head. "Eleven has been looking for him and she doesn't think so."

"Eleven has been looking for him? I didn't know that. How—"

"Eleven didn't get to be High Witch for nothing. Her power extends through the city and beyond. She can sense what's out there, to an extent."

Eddie snorted. "She can feel disturbances in the Force?"

Ben slewed around in the chair and frowned at him. "I'm not joking. After that warlock was killed down in TriBeCa, she started looking into it. When I went to stay with her, she asked me for something of

my father's to make the tracking easier. I gave her the Gray ring. She said she'd let me know if she senses Pennywise anywhere in the city, but so far she hasn't."

"Maybe she just wanted your ring," Eddie said. "She sure wears a lot of jewelry."

"She can have it." Ben's hand tightened around the bit of mirror in his grasp; Eddie noted with alarm the blood welling up around the jagged edges where they cut into his skin. "It's worthless to me."

"Hey," Eddie said, and leaned down to take the glass out of his hand. "Easy there." He slid the piece of Portal into the pocket of his jacket where it hung on the wall. The edges of the glass were dark with blood, Ben's palms scored with red lines. "Maybe we should get you back to Eleven's," he said as gently as he could. "You've been away for many hours—"

"I doubt she minds, somehow," Ben said, but he stood up obediently enough and reached for his stele, which was propped against the wall. As he drew a healing rune on the back of his bleeding right hand, he said, "There's something I've been meaning to ask you."

"And what's that?" Eddie was getting ready for the bunch of questions about the kiss.

But Ben said, "When you got me out of the cell in the Silent City, how did you do it? How did you unlock the door?"

Eddie frowned. "Oh. I just used a regular Opening rune, and—"

He was interrupted by a harsh, tolling ring, and clapped his hand to her pocket before he realized that the sound he'd heard was much louder and sharper than any sound his phone could make. He looked around in confusion.

"That's the Institute's doorbell," Ben said, grabbing his jacket. "Come on."

They were halfway to the foyer when they saw Richie approached them. "It's three in the morning!" he said to them, in a tone that suggested that this was all Ben's, or possibly Eddie's, fault. "Who's

ringing our doorbell at three in the morning?"

"Maybe it's the Inquisitor," Eddie said, feeling suddenly cold.

"She could get in on her own," said Richie. "Any Shadowhunter could. The Institute is only closed to mundanes and Downworlders."

Eddie felt his heart contract. "Stan!" he said. "It must be him!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake," Beverly appeared behind Eddie and yawned. "Couldn't he have waited to tomorrow? "

They had reached the foyer, which was empty; Georgie must have gone to bed on his own. Ben stalked across the room and toggled a switch on the far wall. Somewhere inside the cathedral a distant rumbling thump was audible. "There," Ben said. "Elevator's on its way."

"I can't believe he didn't have the dignity and presence of mind just to get drunk and pass out in some gutter," said Richie. "I must say, I'm disappointed in the little fellow."

Eddie barely heard him. A rising sense of fear made his blood slow and thick. He remembered his dream: the angels, the ice, Stan with his bleeding wings. He shivered.

Ben looked at him sympathetically. "It is cold in here," he observed. He reached up and took down what looked like a blue velvet coat from one of the coat hooks. "Here," he said. "Put this on."

Eddie slid the coat on and drew it close around him. It was too long, but it was warm. It had a hood, too, lined with satin. Eddie pushed it back so he could see the elevator doors opening.

They opened on a hollow box whose mirrored sides reflected his own pale and startled face. Without a pause for thought, he stepped inside.

Beverly looked at him in confusion. "What are you doing?"

"It's Stan down there," Eddie said. "I know it is."

“But—”

Suddenly, Richie was beside Eddie, holding the doors open for Beverly and Ben “Are you coming or not?” he said.

With a theatrical sigh, they followed.

Eddie tried to catch his eye as the three of them rode down in silence, but Richie wouldn't look at him. He was looking at himself sidelong in the elevator mirror, whistling softly under his breath as he always did when he was nervous. Eddie remembered the slight tremor in his touch as he had taken hold of him in the Seelie Court. He thought of the look on Stan's face—and then of him almost running to get away, vanishing into the shadows at the edge of the park. There was a knot of dread inside Eddie's chest and he didn't know why.

The elevator doors opened onto the nave of the cathedral, alive with the dancing light of candles. He pushed past Richie in his hurry to get out of the elevator and practically ran down the narrow aisle between the pews. He stumbled on the dragging edge of his coat and bunched it up impatiently in his hand before dashing to the wide double doors. On the inside they were barred with bronze bolts the size of Eddie's arms. As he reached for the highest bolt, the bell rang through the church again. He heard Ben whisper something to Richie, and then Eddie was hauling on the bolt, dragging it back, and he felt Richie's hand over his, helping him pull the heavy doors open.

Night air swept in, guttering the candles in their brackets. The air smelled of city: of salt and fumes, cooling concrete and garbage, and underneath those familiar smells, the scent of copper, like the tang of a new penny.

At first Eddie thought the steps were empty. Then he blinked and saw Adrian standing there, his head of black curls tousled by the night breeze, his white shirt open at the neck to show the scar in the hollow of his throat. In his arms he held a body.

That was all Eddie saw as he stared in bewilderment, a *body* . Someone very dead, arms and legs dangling like limp ropes, head fallen back to expose the mangled throat. He felt Richie's hand tighten around him arm like a vise, and only then did he look more

closely and see the familiar corduroy jacket with its torn sleeve, the blue T-shirt underneath now stained and spotted with blood, he heard Beverly scream, and after a few seconds of shock, Eddie screamed too.

Notes for the Chapter:

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13. As I Lay Dying

Beverly felt her knees give and would have slid to the ground if Ben hadn't been holding her up. "Don't look," he said in her ear. "For God's sake, don't look."

But she couldn't not look at the blood matting Stan's brown hair, his torn throat, the gashes along his dangling wrists. Black spots dotted her vision as she fought for breath.

It was Richie who snatched one of the empty candelabras from the side of the door and aimed it at the dark-haired boy as if it were an enormous three-pointed spear. "*What have you done to Stan?*"

"*El no es muerto,*" the boysaid, in a flat and emotionless voice, and laid Stan down on the ground almost at Eddie's feet, with a surprising gentleness. Eddie was kneeling down, in shock, it didn't look like he was breathing at all.

"Did you say—" Eddie began.

"He isn't dead," Richie said, approaching Eddie to hug him. "He's not dead."

Beverly went to her knees on the concrete. She felt no disgust at touching Stan's bloodied skin as she slid her hands under his head, pulling him up into her lap. She felt only the terrified childish horror she remembered from being five years old and having broken her mother's priceless Liberty lamp. Nothing, said a voice in the back of her head, will put these pieces back together again. "Stan," she said, touching his face. "Stan, it's me."

"He can't hear you," said the boy. "He's dying."

Eddie's head jerked up. "But you said—"

"I said he was not dead yet," said the boy. "But in a few minutes—ten, perhaps—his heart will slow and stop. Already he is beyond seeing or hearing anything."

Beverly's arms tightened around him involuntarily. "We have to get

him to a hospital—or call Eleven .”

“They can’t do him any good,” said the boy. “You don’t understand.”

“No,” said Richie, his voice as soft as silk tipped with needle-sharp points. “We don’t. And perhaps you should explain yourself. Because otherwise I’m going to assume you’re a rogue bloodsucker, and cut your heart out. Like I should have done last time we met.”

The boy smiled at him without amusement. “You swore not to harm me, Shadowhunter. Have you forgotten?”

“I never actually finished the oath,” Richie reminded him.

“And I never started,” said Ben, taking the candelabra from Richie’s hands.

The boy ignored him. He was still looking at Richie. “I remembered that night you broke into the Dumort looking for your friend. It is why I brought him here”—and he gestured at Stan—“when I found him in the hotel, instead of letting the others drink him to death. You see, he broke in, without permission, and therefore was fair game for us. But I kept him alive, knowing he was yours. I have no wish for a war with the Nephilim.”

“He broke in ?” Eddie said in disbelief. “Stan would never do anything that stupid and crazy.”

“But he did,” said the boy, with the faintest trace of a smile, “because he was afraid he was becoming one of us, and he wanted to know if the process could be reversed. Before you came to rescue him, I gave the mundane my blood in case something happened to him. You know that is how we pass our powers to each other. Through the blood.”

She looked at Eddie, who seemed realize something. “He thought he was turning into one of you,” he said. “He went to the hotel to see if it was true.”

“Yes,” said the boy. “The pity of it is that the effects of my blood would probably have faded over time had he done nothing. But now —” He gestured at Stan’s limp body expressively.

"Now what?" said Ben, with a hard edge to his voice. "Now he'll die?"

"And rise again. Now he will be a vampire."

Beverly's eyes widened in shock. Standing up. "*What?*"

Richie looked at the boy with bleak eyes. "You're lying."

"Wait and see," said the boy. "He will die and rise as one of the Night Children. That is also why I came. Stan is one of mine now."

"There's nothing that can be done? No way to reverse it?" demanded Ben, panic tinging his voice. Eddie thought distantly that it was strange that these two, Richie and Ben, who did not love Stan the way he did, were the ones doing the talking. But perhaps they were speaking for him precisely because he couldn't bear to say a word.

"You could cut off his head and burn his heart in a fire, but I doubt that you will do that."

"No!" Eddie hurried to Stan's side. "Don't you dare hurt him."

"I have no need to," said Adrian.

"I wasn't talking to you." Eddie didn't look up. "Don't you even think about it, Richie. Don't even think about it."

There was silence. He could hear Beverly's worried intake of breath, and Adrian, of course, did not breathe at all. Richie hesitated a moment before he said, "Eddie, what would Stan want? Is this what he'd want for himself?"

Eddie looked at Beverly, but she was staring at him also waiting for an answer. "Eddie, you don't think—"

Stan gasped suddenly, arching upward in Eddie's grasp. Eddie caught at him, pulling him closer. His eyes were wide and blind and terrified. He reached up. Eddie wasn't sure if he was trying to touch his face or claw at it, not knowing who he was.

"Stan," Eddie said. "It's me. It's Eddie." His hands slipped on Stan's; when he looked down, he saw they were wet with blood from his shirt and from the tears that had slid down his face without him noticing. "Stan, please. I need you."

Stan breathed out—a harsh, ratcheting sound—and then did not breathe in again.

Beverly was suddenly next to Eddie, saying something in his ear, but Eddie couldn't hear her. The sound of rushing water, like an oncoming tidal wave, filled his ears. He watched as Beverly tried gently to pry his hands away from Stan's, and couldn't. Eddie was surprised. He didn't feel like he was holding on to him that tightly.

Giving up, Beverly got to her feet and turned angrily on Adrian. She was shouting. Halfway through the tirade, Eddie's hearing switched back on, like a radio that had finally found a station within range. "—and now what are we supposed to do?" Beverly screamed.

"Bury him," said Adrian.

The candelabra swung up again in Ben's hand. "That's not funny."

"It isn't supposed to be," said the vampire, unfazed. "It is how we are made. We are drained, blooded, and buried. When he digs his own way out of a grave, that is when a vampire is born."

Ben made a faint sound of disgust. "I don't think I could do that."

"Some can't," said Adrian. "If no one is there to help them dig out, they stay like that, trapped like rats under the earth."

A sound tore its way out of Eddie's throat. A sob that was as raw as a scream. He said, "I won't put him in the ground."

"Then he'll stay like this," said Adrian mercilessly. "Dead but not quite dead. Never waking."

They were all staring down at him. Ben and Richie as if they were holding their breaths, Beverly was waiting on his response. Adrian looked incurious, almost bored.

“You didn’t come into the Institute because you can’t, isn’t that right?” Eddie said. “Because it’s holy ground and you’re unholy.”

“That’s not exactly—” Ben began, but Adrian cut him off with a gesture.

“I should tell you,” said the vampire boy, “that there is not much time. The longer we wait before putting him into the ground, the less likely he’ll be able to dig his own way back out of it.”

Eddie looked down at Stan. He really would look as if he were sleeping, if it weren’t for the long gashes along his bare skin. “We can bury him,” he said. “But I want it to be in a Jewish cemetery. And I want to be there when he wakes up.”

Adrian’s eyes glittered. “It will not be pleasant.”

“Nothing ever is.” Beverly set her jaw.

Eddie got to his feet. “Let’s get going. We only have a few hours until dawn.”

The Cemetery was in the outskirts of Queens, where apartment buildings gave way to rows of orderly-looking Victorian houses painted gingerbread colors: pink, white, and blue. The streets were wide and mostly deserted, the avenue leading up to the cemetery unlit except by a single streetlight. It took them a short while with their steles to break in through the locked gates, and another while to find a spot hidden enough for Adrian to begin digging. It was at the top of a low hill, sheltered from the road below by a thick line of trees. Eddie, Richie, and Ben were protected with glamour, but there was no way to hide Beverly, Adrian or to hide Stan’s body, so the trees provided a welcome cover.

The sides of the hill not facing the road were thickly layered with headstones, many of them bearing a pointed Star of David at the top. They gleamed white and smooth as milk in the moonlight. In the distance was a lake, its surface pleated with glittering ripples. A nice place, Eddie thought. A good place to come and lay flowers on someone’s grave, to sit awhile and think about their life, what they meant to you. Not a good place to come at night, under cover of

darkness, to bury your friend in a shallow dirt grave without the benefit of a coffin or a service.

"Did he suffer?" he asked Adrian.

He looked up from his digging, leaning on the handle of the shovel like the grave digger in Hamlet . "*What?*"

"Stan. Did he suffer? Did the vampires hurt him?"

"No. The blood death is not such a bad way to die," said Adrian, his musical voice soft. "The bite drugs you. It is pleasant, like going to sleep."

A wave of dizziness passed over Eddie, and for a moment he thought he might faint.

"Eddie." Richie's voice snapped him out of his reverie. "Come on. You don't have to watch this."

He held out his hand. Looking past him, Eddie could see Ben standing with his whip in her hand, and Beverly at his side, shivering. Even with her long coat.

They had wrapped Stan's body in a blanket and it lay on the ground at Eddie's feet, as if he were guarding it. *Not it*, Eddie reminded himself fiercely. *Him. Stan.*

"I want to be here when he wakes up."

"I know. We'll come right back." When he didn't move, Richie took his unresisting arm and drew him away from the clearing and down the side of the hill. There were boulders here, just above the first line of graves; he sat down on one, zipping up his jacket. It was surprisingly chilly out. For the first time this season Eddie could see his breath when he exhaled. He sat down on the boulder beside Richie and stared down at the lake.

He could hear the rhythmic *thump-thump* of Adrian's spade hitting the dirt and the shoveled dirt hitting the ground. Adrian wasn't human; he worked fast. It wouldn't take that long for him to dig a grave. And Stan wasn't all that big a person; the grave wouldn't have to be that

deep.

A stab of pain twisted through his abdomen. He bent forward, hands splayed across his stomach. "I feel sick."

"I know. That's why I brought you out here. You looked like you were going to throw up on Adrian's feet."

Eddie made a soft groaning noise.

"Might have wiped the smirk off his face," Richie observed reflectively. "There's that to consider."

"Shut up." The pain had eased. He tipped his head back, looking up at the moon, a circle of chipped silver polish floating in a sea of stars. "This is my fault."

"It's not your fault."

"You're right. It's *our* fault."

Eddie looked at Richie silently for a moment. He needed a haircut. His hair curled the way vines did when they got too long, in looping tendrils. The scars on his face and throat looked like they had been etched there with metallic ink. He was beautiful, he thought miserably.

"What?" Richie said. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Eddie wanted to throw into his arms and sob at the exact same time that he wanted to pound on him with his fists. Instead, he said, "If it weren't for what happened in the faerie court, Stan would still be alive."

Richie reached down and savagely yanked a hunk of grass out of the ground. Dirt still clung to the roots. He tossed it aside. "We were forced to do what we did. It's not as if we did it for fun, or to hurt him. Besides," he said, with the ghost of a smile, "it meant nothing."

"Don't say it like that—"

"You're the one who said it."

"Richie—"

"*Richie!*" Another voice, calling his name. It was Bill, slightly out of breath from running. He was holding a black plastic bag in one hand. With everything that happened, Eddie didn't realize Bill wasn't with them. Bill came to a stop in front of Richie and held out the bag. "I brought b-blood," he said. "Like you asked."

Richie opened the top of the bag, peered in, and wrinkled his nose. "Do I want to ask you where you got this?"

"From a b-butcher shop in Greenpoint," Bill said. "They bleed their m-meat to make it halal. It's animal blood."

"Blood is blood," said Richie, and stood up. He looked down at Eddie and hesitated. "When Adrian said this wouldn't be pleasant, he wasn't lying. You can stay here. I'll send Beverly down to wait with you."

"I want to be there. I *have* to be there."

He could see only part of Richie's face in the shadows, but Eddie thought he looked almost—impressed. "I know better than to tell you there's anything you can't do," he said. "Let's go."

Adrian was tamping down a large rectangle of dirt when they came back into the clearing, Richie and Eddie a little ahead of Bill, who seemed to be arguing to himself. Stan's body was gone. Ben was sitting on the ground, his whip coiled at his ankles in a golden circle. He was shivering. "Jesus, it's cold," Eddie said, pulling Ben's heavy coat close around him. The velvet was warm, at least. He tried to ignore the fact that the hem of it was stained with Stan's blood. "It's as if it turned to winter overnight."

"Be glad it isn't winter," said Adrian, setting the spade against the trunk of a nearby tree. "The ground freezes like iron in winter. Sometimes it is impossible to dig and the fledgling must wait months, before it can be born."

"Is that what you call them? Fledglings?" said Eddie. The word seemed wrong, too friendly somehow. It reminded him of ducklings.

“Yes,” said Adrian. “It means the not-yet or newly born.”

Adrian glanced at Richie, who was lounging against a tree trunk. “You keep surprisingly illustrious company, Shadowhunter.”

“Are you talking about yourself again?” asked Richie. He smoothed the churned dirt with the tip of a boot. “That seems boastful.”

“M-maybe he meant me,” said Bill. Everyone looked at him in surprise. Bill so rarely made jokes. He smiled nervously. “S-sorry,” he said. “Nerves.”

“So what do we do now?” Beverly demanded, hugging herself for warmth.

Adrian, noticing her gesture, smiled minutely. “It is always cold at a rising,” he said. “The fledgling draws strength from the living things that surround it, taking from them the energy to rise.”

Beverly glared at him resentfully. “You don’t seem cold.”

“I’m not living.” He stepped back a little from the edge of the grave—Eddie forced himself to think of it as a grave, since that’s exactly what it was—and gestured to the others to do the same. “Make room,” Adrian said. “Stan can hardly rise if you are all standing on top of him.”

They moved hastily backward. Eddie found Ben clutching his elbow and turned to see that the other boy was white to the lips. “What’s wrong?”

“Everything,” Ben said. “Eddie, maybe we should have just let him go —”

“Let him die, you mean.” Eddie jerked his arm out of Ben’s grip. “Of course that’s what you think. You think everyone who isn’t just like you is better off dead anyway.”

Ben’s face was the picture of misery. “That isn’t—”

A sound tore through the clearing, a sound unlike any Eddie had ever heard before—a sort of pounding rhythm coming from deep

underground, as if suddenly the heartbeat of the world had become audible.

The grave was roiling like the surface of an unsteady ocean. Ripples appeared in its surface. Suddenly it burst apart, clods of dirt flying. A small mountain of dirt, like an anthill, heaved itself upward. At the center of the mountain was a hand, fingers splayed, clawing at the dirt.

"Stan!" Eddie tried to rush forward, but Adrian yanked him back. "Let me go!" He tried to pull himself free, but Adrian's grip was like steel. "Can't you see he needs our help? "

"He should do this himself," Adrian said, without loosening his hold on Eddie. "It is better that way."

"It's your way! It's not mine!" He jerked himself out of his grip and ran toward the grave, just as it heaved upward, hurling his back to the ground. A hunched shape was forcing itself out of the hastily dug grave, fingers like filthy claws sunk deep into the earth. Its bare arms were streaked black with dirt and blood. It tore itself free of the sucking earth, crawled a few feet, and collapsed onto the ground.

"Stan," Eddie whispered. Because of course it was Stan, *Stan* , *not an it* . Eddie scrambled to his feet and ran toward him, his sneakers sinking deep into the churned earth.

"Eddie!" Beverly shouted. "What are you doing?"

Eddie fell onto his knees next to Stan, who lay as still as if he really were dead. His hair was filthy and matted with clots of dirt, his T-shirt torn down the side, blood on the skin that showed under it.

"Stan," Eddie said, and reached to touch his shoulder. "Stan, are you —"

His body tensed under Eddie's fingers, every muscle tightening, his skin hard as iron.

"—all right?" Eddie finished.

He turned his head, and Eddie saw his eyes. They were blank, lifeless.

With a sharp cry, Stan rolled over and sprang at him swift as a striking snake. He struck him squarely, knocking Eddie back into the dirt.

“Stan!” Eddie shouted, but he didn’t seem to hear. His face was twisted, unrecognizable as he loomed up over Eddie, his lips curling back, and Eddie saw his sharp canines, the fang-teeth, gleam in the moonlight like white bone needles. Suddenly terrified, Eddie kicked out at him, but he grabbed his shoulders and forced him back down into the dirt. Stan’s hands were bloody, the nails broken, but he was incredibly strong, stronger even than Eddie’s own Shadowhunter muscles. Stan got closer to him—

And was plucked away and sent flying as if he weighed no more than a pebble. Eddie shot to his feet, gasping, and saw Beverly lower her hand. A sign that she used magic to drag Stan away. “Are you okay?” She asked Eddie.

Eddie sucked in a breath. It sounded like a sob. “He doesn’t know me.”

Adrian turned to kneel down by Stan, who had landed a short distance away and was curled, twitching, on the ground.

“He knows you. He doesn’t care.” Adrian looked over his shoulder at Richie. “He is starving. He needs blood.”

Richie, who had been standing white-faced and frozen at the grave’s edge, stepped forward and held out the plastic bag mutely, like an offering. Adrian snatched it and tore it open. A number of plastic packets of red fluid fell out. He seized one, muttering, and tore it open with sharp nails, spattering blood down the front of his dirt-stained white shirt.

Stan, as if scenting the blood, curled up and let out a piteous wail. He was still twitching; his broken-nailed hands gouged at the dirt and his eyes were rolled back to the whites. Adrian held out the blood packet, letting some of the red fluid drip onto Stan’s face, streaking the white skin with scarlet. “There you go,” he said, almost in a croon. “Drink, little fledgling. Drink.”

Stan snatched the packet of blood out of Adrian's thin brown hand and tore into it with his teeth. He swallowed the blood in a few gulps and tossed the packet aside with another wail; Adrian was ready with a second one, and pressed it into his hand. "Do not drink too fast," he cautioned. "You will make yourself sick." Stan, of course, ignored him; he had managed to get the second packet open without help and was gulping greedily at the contents.

Blood ran from the corners of his mouth, down his throat, and splattered his hands with fat red drops. His eyes were closed. Adrian turned to look at Eddie. He could feel Richie staring at him too, and the others, all with identical expressions of horror and disgust. "Next time he feeds," Adrian said calmly, "it will not be quite so messy."

14. Smoke and Steel

The critical care unit of Seth Isabel Hospital always reminded Eddie of photos he'd seen of Antarctica: It was cold and remote-feeling, and everything was either gray, white, or pale blue. The walls of his mother's room were white, the tubes that snaked around her head and the endless beeping banks of instruments around the bed were gray, and the blanket pulled up around her chest was pale blue. Her face was white. The only color in the room was her brown hair, flaring across the snowy expanse of pillow like a bright, incongruous flag planted at the south pole.

Eddie wondered how Jim was managing to pay for this private room, where the money had come from and how he'd gotten it. He supposed he could ask him when he got back from buying vending machine coffee in the ugly little café on the third floor. The coffee from the machine down there looked like tar and tasted like it too, but Jim seemed addicted to the stuff.

The metal legs of the bedside chair squeaked across the floor as Eddie pulled it out and sat down slowly.

"Mom," he said. He reached out and took his mother's left hand; there was a puncture mark on the wrist still, where Pennywise had shoved one end of a tube. The skin of his mother's hand—always rough and chapped, spattered with paint and turpentine—felt like the dry bark of a tree. Eddie folded his fingers around Sonia's, feeling a hard lump come into his throat. "Mom, I..." He cleared his throat. "Jim says you can hear me. I don't know if that's true or not. Anyway, I came because I needed to talk to you. It's okay if you can't say anything back. See, the thing is, it's..." He swallowed again and looked toward the window, the strip of blue sky visible at the edge of the brick wall that faced the hospital. "It's Stan. Something's happened to him. Something that was my fault."

Now that he wasn't looking at his mother's face, the story poured out of him all of it: how he'd met Richie and the other Shadowhunters, the search for the Mortal Cup, Beverly being a witch, Keene's betrayal and the battle at Renwick's, the realization that Pennywise was his father as well as Ben's. More recent events too: the nighttime

visit to the Bone City, the Soul-Sword, the Inquisitor's hatred of Ben, and the woman with the silver hair. And then he told his mother about the Seelie Court, about the price the Queen had demanded, and what had happened to Stan afterward. He could feel tears burn his throat while he talked, but it was a relief to tell it, to unburden himself to someone, even someone who—probably—couldn't hear him.

"So, basically," he said, "I've screwed everything up royally. I remember you saying that growing up happens when you start having things you look back on and wish you could change. I guess that means I've grown up now. It's just that—that I—" *I thought you'd be there when I did.* He choked on tears just as someone behind him cleared his throat.

Eddie wheeled around and saw Jim standing in the doorway, a Styrofoam cup in his hand. Under the hospital's fluorescent lights, Eddie could see how tired he looked. There was gray in his hair, and his blue flannel shirt was rumpled.

"How long have you been standing there?"

"Not long," Jim said. "I brought you some coffee." He held out the cup but Eddie waved it away.

"I hate that stuff. It tastes like feet."

At that he smiled. "How would you know what feet taste like?"

"I just know." Eddie leaned forward and kissed Sonia's cold cheek before standing up. "Bye, Mom."

Jim's blue pickup was parked in the concrete lot under the hospital. They had pulled out onto the FDR highway before he spoke.

"I heard what you said back at the hospital."

"I *thought* you were eavesdropping." Eddie spoke without anger. There was nothing in what he'd said to his mother that Jim couldn't know.

"What happened to Stan wasn't your fault."

Eddie heard the words, but they seemed to bounce off him as if there were an invisible wall surrounding him. Like the wall Keene had built around him when he'd betrayed him to Pennywise, but this time he couldn't hear anything through it, couldn't feel anything through it either. He was as numb as if he'd been encased in ice.

"Did you hear me, Eddie?"

"Everything that happened to Stan was my fault."

"Because he was angry at you when he went back to the hotel? He didn't go back to the hotel because he was angry at you, Eddie. I've heard of situations like this before. They call them 'darklings,' those who are half-turned. He would have felt drawn back to the hotel by a compulsion he couldn't control."

"Because he had Adrian's blood in him. But that would never have happened either if it weren't for me. If I hadn't brought him to that party—"

"You thought it would be safe there. You weren't putting him in any danger you hadn't put yourself in. You can't torture yourself like this," said Jim, turning onto the Brooklyn Bridge. The water slid by under them in sheets of silvery gray. "There's no point to it."

Eddie slumped lower in his seat, curling his fingers into the sleeves of his knitted green hoodie. Its edges were frayed and the yarn tickled his cheek.

"Look," Jim went on. "In all the years I've known him, there's always been exactly one place Stan wanted to be, and he's always fought like hell to make sure he got there and stayed there."

"Where's that?"

"Wherever you were," he said. "Remember when you fell out of that tree on the farm when you were ten, and broke your arm? Remember how he made them let him ride with you in the ambulance on the way to the hospital? He kicked and yelled till they gave in."

"You laughed," said Eddie, remembering, "and my mom hit you in the shoulder."

"It was hard not to laugh. Determination like that in a ten-year-old is something to see. He was like a pit bull."

"If pit bulls wore glasses and were allergic to ragweed."

"You can't put a price on that kind of loyalty," said Jim, more seriously.

"I know. Don't make me feel worse."

"Eddie, I'm telling you he made his own decisions. What you're blaming yourself for is *being what you are*. And that's no one's fault and nothing you can change. You told him the truth and he made up his own mind what he wanted to do about that. Everyone has choices to make; no one has the right to take those choices away from us. Not even out of love."

"But that's just it," Eddie said. "When you love someone, you don't have a choice. Love takes away all of your choices."

"It's a lot better than the alternative." Jim guided the truck onto Flatbush. Eddie didn't reply; just gazed dully out the window. The area just off the bridge was not one of the prettier parts of Brooklyn; either side of the avenue was lined with ugly office buildings and auto body shops. Normally he hated it but right now the surroundings suited his mood.

"So, have you heard from—?" Jim began, apparently deciding it was time to change the subject.

"Stan? Yes, you know I have."

"Actually, I was going to say Richie."

"Oh." Richie had called his cell phone several times and left messages. Eddie hadn't picked up or called him back. Not talking to him was Eddie's penance for what had happened to Stan. It was the worst way he could think to punish himself. "No, I haven't."

Jim's voice was carefully neutral. "You might want to. Just to see if he's all right. He's probably having a pretty bad time of it, considering—"

Eddie shifted in his seat. "I'm not calling Richie." He heard the coldness in his own voice and was almost shocked at himself. "I have to be there for Stan right now."

Jim sighed. "If he's having trouble coming to terms with his condition, maybe he should—"

"Of course he's having trouble!" He shot Jim an accusing look, though he was concentrating on traffic and didn't notice. "You of all people ought to understand what it's like to—"

"Wake up a monster one day?" Jim didn't sound bitter, just weary. "You're right, I do understand. And if he ever wants to talk to me, I'd be happy to tell him all about it. He will get through this, even if he thinks he won't."

"It's not the same," Eddie said. "At least you grew up knowing werewolves were real. Before he can tell anyone he's a vampire, he'll have to convince them that vampires *exist* in the first place."

Jim looked as if he were about to say something, then changed his mind. "I'm sure you're right." They were in Williamsburg now, driving down half-empty Kent Avenue, warehouses rising above them on either side. "Still. I got him something. It's in the glove compartment. Just in case..."

Eddie snapped the compartment open and frowned. He took out a shiny folded pamphlet, the kind they kept stacked in clear plastic stands in hospital waiting rooms. "*How to Come Out to Your Parents*," he read out loud. "JIM. Don't be ridiculous."

"The pamphlet's all about telling your parents difficult truths about yourself they may not want to face. Maybe he could adapt one of the speeches, or just listen to the advice in general—"

"Jim!" Eddie spoke so sharply that Jim pulled the truck to a stop with a loud screech of brakes. They were just in front of Jim's house, the water of the East River glittering darkly on their left, the sky streaked with soot and shadows. Another, darker shadow crouched on Jim's front porch.

Jim narrowed his eyes. In wolf form, he'd told Eddie, his eyesight was perfect; in human form, he remained nearsighted. "Is that...?"

"Stan. Yes." Eddie knew him even as an outline. "I'd better go talk to him."

"Sure. I'll, ah, run some errands. I have things to pick up."

"What kind of things?"

He waved Eddie away. "Food things. I'll be back in a half hour. Don't stay outside, though. Go in the house and lock up."

"You know I will."

Eddie watched as the pickup sped away, then turned toward the house. His heart was pounding. He'd talked to Stan on the phone a few times but he hadn't seen him since they'd brought him, groggy and blood-splattered, to Jim's house in the dark early hours of that horrible morning to clean up before driving him home. He'd thought Stan ought to go to the Institute, but of course that was impossible. Stan would never see the inside of a church or synagogue again.

Eddie had watched him walking up the path to his front door, shoulders hunched forward as if he were walking against a heavy wind. When the porch light came on automatically, he flinched away from it, and Eddie knew it was because he had thought it was the light of the sun; and Eddie started to cry, silently, in the backseat of the pickup, the tears splashing down onto the strange black Mark on his forearm.

"Eddie," Richie had whispered, and had reached for his hand, but Eddie had recoiled from him just as Stan had recoiled from the light. He wouldn't touch him. That was his penance, hid payment for what he'd done to Stan.

Now, as he mounted the steps to Jim's porch, his mouth went dry and his throat swelled with the pressure of tears. He told himself not to cry. Crying would only make Stan feel worse.

Stan was sitting in the shadows at the corner of the porch, watching him. Eddie could see the gleam of his eyes in the darkness. He

wondered if they'd held that sort of light in them before; Eddie couldn't remember. "Stan?"

He stood up in one single smooth graceful movement that sent a chill up Eddie's spine. There was one thing Stan had never been, and that was graceful. There was something else about him, something different—

"Sorry if I startled you." He spoke carefully, almost formally, as if they were strangers.

"It's all right, it's just—How long have you been here?"

"Not long. I can only travel after the sun starts going down, remember? I accidentally put my hand about an inch out the window yesterday and nearly charred off my fingers. Luckily I heal fast."

Eddie fumbled for his key, unlocked the door, swung it open. Pale light spilled out onto the porch. "Jim said we should stay inside."

"Because the nasty things," Stan said, pushing past him, "they come out in the dark."

The living room was full of warm yellow light. Eddie shut the door behind them and flipped the dead bolts closed. Ben's blue coat was still hanging on a hook by the door. He'd meant to take it to a dry cleaner to see if they could get the bloodstains out, but he hadn't had a chance. He stared at it for a moment, steeling himself, before turning to look at Stan.

He was standing in the middle of the room, hands awkwardly in the pockets of his jacket. He was wearing jeans and a frayed I ♥ NEW YORK T-shirt that had belonged to his dad. Everything about him was familiar to Eddie, and yet he seemed like a stranger. "Beverly came earlier," Eddie said. "She had classes with Eleven."

"I'm glad one of us is actually enjoying some of this." He sat down on the couch and Eddie joined him, sitting beside him but not too near. Up close, he could see how pale Stan's skin looked, blue traceries of veins apparent just beneath the surface. His eyes without the glasses looked huge and dark, the lashes like black ink strokes. "My mom

found some blood bottles. I told her they were for a project, but she won't buy the same story again."

"You're going to have to tell her," Eddie said, more firmly than he felt. "You can't hide your—your condition forever."

"I can try." He raked a hand through his dark hair, his mouth twisting. "Eddie, what am I going to do? My mom keeps bringing me food and I have to throw it out the window—I haven't been outside in two days, but I don't know how much longer I can go on pretending I have the flu. Eventually she's going to bring me to the doctor, and then what? I don't have a *heartbeat*. He'll tell her that I'm *dead*."

"Or write you up as a medical miracle," said Eddie.

"It's not funny."

"I know, I was just trying to—"

"I keep thinking about blood," Stan said. "I dream about it. Wake up thinking about it. Pretty soon I'll be writing morbid emo poetry about it."

"Look, Stan, Jim thinks you should tell your mom. You can't hide it from her forever."

"I can damn well try."

"Think about Jim," he said desperately. "You can still live a normal life. You just have to learn how to work your life around it. Lots of people do it."

"I'm not sure I'm people. Not anymore."

"You are to me," Eddie said. "Anyway, being human is overrated."

"At least Richie can't call me *mundane* anymore. What's that you're holding?" he asked, noticing the pamphlet, still rolled up in Eddie's left hand.

"Oh, this?" He held it up. "*How to Come Out to Your Parents*."

Stan scoffed. "Very funny. I don't have to come out to my mother, anyways. She already thinks I'm gay because I'm not interested in sports and I haven't had a serious girlfriend.

"But you have to come out as a vampire," Eddie pointed out. "Jim thought maybe you could, you know, use one of the suggested speeches in the pamphlet, except use the word 'undead' instead of—"

"I get it, I get it." Stan spread the pamphlet open. "Here, I'll practice on you." He cleared his throat. "Mom. I have something to tell you. I'm undead. Now, I know you may have some preconceived notions about the undead. I know you may not be comfortable with the idea of me being undead. But I'm here to tell you that the undead are just like you and me." Stan paused. "Well, okay. Possibly more like me than you."

"STAN."

"All right, all right." He went on. "The first thing you need to understand is that I'm the same person I always was. Being undead isn't the most important thing about me. It's just part of who I am. The second thing you should know is that it isn't a choice. I was born this way." Stan squinted at him over the pamphlet. "Sorry, *reborn* this way."

Eddie sighed. "You're not trying ."

"At least I can tell her you buried me in a Jewish cemetery," Stan said, abandoning the pamphlet. "Maybe I should start small. Tell my sister first."

"I'll go with you if you want. Maybe I can help make them understand."

Stan looked up at him, surprised, and he saw the cracks in his armor of bitter humor, and the fear that was underneath. "You'd do that?"

"I—" Eddie began, and was cut off by a sudden deafening screech of tires and the sound of shattering glass. He leaped to his feet and raced to the window, Stan beside him. He yanked the curtain aside and stared out.

Jim's pickup truck was pulled up onto the lawn, its motor grinding, dark strips of burned rubber laid across the sidewalk. One of the truck's headlights was blazing; the other had been smashed and there was a dark stain across the front grille of the truck—and something humped, white and motionless lying underneath the front wheels. Bile rose in Eddie's throat. Had Jim run someone over? But no—impatiently, Eddie scraped the glamour from his vision as if he were scraping dirt from a window. The thing under Jim's wheels wasn't human. It was smooth, white, almost larval, and it twitched like a worm pinned to a board.

The driver's side door of the truck burst open and Jim leaped out. Ignoring the creature pinned under his wheels, he dashed across the lawn toward the porch. Following him with his gaze, Eddie saw that there was a dark shape sprawled in the shadows there. This shape was human—tall, with dark hair—

"That's that werewolf guy. Mike" Stan sounded astonished. "What happened?"

"I don't know." Eddie grabbed his stole off the top of a bookcase. They clattered down the steps, and dashed for the shadows where Jim crouched, his hands on Mike's shoulders, lifting him and propping him gently against the side of the porch. Up close, Eddie could see that the front of Mike's shirt was torn and there was a gash in his shoulder, leaking a slow pulse of blood.

Stann stopped dead. Eddie, nearly crashing into him, gave a gasp of surprise and shot him an angry look before he realized. The blood. He was afraid of it, afraid of looking at it.

"He's all right," said Jim, as Mike's head rolled and he groaned. Jim slapped his cheek lightly and his eyes fluttered open. "Mike. Mike, can you hear me?"

Mike blinked and nodded, looking dazed. "Jim?" he whispered. "What happened?" He winced. "My shoulder—"

"Come on. I'd better get you inside." Jim hoisted him his arms, and Eddie remembered that he'd always thought Jim was surprisingly strong for someone who worked in a bookstore. He'd put it down to

all that hauling around of heavy boxes. Now he knew better. “Eddie. Stan. Come on.”

They headed back inside, where Jim laid Mike down on the tattered gray velour couch. He sent Stan running for a blanket and Eddie to the kitchen for a wet towel. When Eddie returned, he found Mike propped up against one of the cushions, looking flushed and feverish. He was chattering rapidly and nervously to Jim, “I was coming across the lawn when—I smelled something. Something rotten, like garbage. I turned around and it hit me—”

“What hit you?” said Eddie, handing Jim the towel.

Mike frowned. “I didn’t see it. It knocked me over and then—I tried to kick it off, but it was too fast—”

“I saw it,” said Jim, his voice flat. “I was driving up to the house and I saw you crossing the lawn—and then I saw it following you, in the shadows at your heels. I tried to yell out the window to you, but you didn’t hear me. Then it knocked you down.”

“*What* was following him?” asked Eddie.

“It was a Drevak demon,” said Jim, his voice grim. “They’re blind. They track by smell. I drove the car up onto the lawn and crushed it.”

Eddie glanced out the window at the truck. The thing that had been twitching under the wheels was gone, unsurprisingly—demons always returned to their home dimensions when they died. “Why would it attack Mike?” Eddie dropped his voice as a thought occurred to him “Do you think it was Pennywise? Looking for werewolf blood for his spell? He got interrupted the last time—”

“I don’t think so,” Jim said, to his surprise. “Drevak demons aren’t bloodsuckers and they definitely couldn’t cause the kind of mayhem you saw in the Silent City. Mostly they’re spies and messengers. I think Mike just got in its way.” He bent to look at Mike, who was moaning softly, his eyes closed. “Can you pull your sleeve up so I can see your shoulder?”

The werewolf boy bit his lip and nodded, then reached over to roll up the sleeve of his sweater. There was a long gash just below his shoulder. Blood had dried to a crust on his arm. Eddie sucked his breath in as he saw that the jagged red cut was lined with what looked like thin black needles poking grotesquely out of the skin.

Mike stared down at his arm in obvious horror. “What *are* those?”

“Drevak demons don’t have teeth; they have poisonous spines in their mouths,” Jim said. “Some of the spines have broken off in your skin.”

Mike’s teeth had begun to chatter. “Poison? Am I going to die?”

“Not if we work fast,” Jim reassured him. “I’m going to have to pull them out, though, and it’s going to hurt. Do you think you can handle it?”

Mike’s face was contorted into a grimace of pain. He managed to nod. “Just ... get them out of me.”

“Get what out?” asked Stan, coming into the room with a rolled-up blanket. He dropped the blanket when he saw Mike’s arm, and took an involuntary step back. “What are *those*?”

“Squeamish about blood, mundane?” Mike said, with a small, twisted smile. Then he gasped. “Oh. It hurts—”

“I know,” Jim said, gently wrapping the towel around the lower part of his arm. From his belt he drew a thin-bladed knife. Mike took a look at the knife and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Do what you have to,” he said in a small voice. “But—I don’t want the others watching.”

“I understand.” Jim turned to Stan and Eddie. “Go in the kitchen, both of you,” he said. “Call the Institute. Tell them what’s happened and have them send someone. They can’t send one of the Brothers, so preferably someone with medical training, or a warlock.” Stan and Eddie stared at him, paralyzed by the sight of the knife and Mike’s slowly purpling arm. “Go!” he said, more sharply, and this time they went.

15. Into the Wild

Stan watched Eddie as he leaned against the refrigerator, biting his lip like he always did when he was upset. Often he forgot how small Eddie was, how light-boned and fragile, but at times like this—times when Stan wanted to put his arms around him—he was restrained by the thought that holding him too hard might hurt Eddie, especially now when he no longer knew his own strength.

Richie, he knew, didn't feel that way. Stan had watched with a sick feeling in his stomach, unable to look away, as Richie had taken Eddie in his arms and kissed him with such force Stan had thought one or the both of them might shatter.

Of course, Eddie was strong, stronger than Stan gave him credit for. He was a Shadowhunter, with all that entailed. But that didn't matter; what they had between them was still as fragile as a flickering candle flame, as delicate as eggshell—and he knew that if it shattered, if he somehow let it break and be destroyed, something inside him would shatter too, something that could never be fixed.

"Stan." Eddie's voice brought him back down to earth. "Stan, are you listening to me?"

"What? Yes, I am. Of course." He leaned against the sink, trying to look as if he'd been paying attention. The tap was dripping, which momentarily distracted him again—each silvery drop of water seemed to shimmer, tear-shaped and perfect, just before it fell. Vampire sight was a strange thing, he thought. His attention kept getting caught by the most ordinary things—the glitter of water, the flowering cracks in a bit of pavement, the sheen of oil on a road—as if he'd never seen them before.

"Stan!" Eddie said again, exasperated. He realized Eddie was holding something green and metallic out to him. His new cell phone. "I said I want you to call Richie."

That snapped him back to attention. "*Me* call him? He hates me."

"No, he doesn't," Eddie said, though he could tell from the look in his

eyes that he only half-believed that. “Anyway, I don’t want to talk to him. Please?”

“Fine.” He took the phone from Eddie’s hand and scrolled through to Richie’s number. “What do you want me to say?”

“Just tell him what happened. He’ll know what to do.”

Richie picked up the phone on the third ring, sounding out of breath. “Eddie,” he said, startling Stan until he realized that of course Eddie’s name would have popped up on Richie’s phone. “Eddie, are you all right?”

Stan hesitated. There was a tone in Richie’s voice he’d never heard before, an anxious concern devoid of sarcasm or defense. Was that how he spoke to Eddie when they were alone? Stan glanced at him; Eddie was watching him with wide eyes, biting unselfconsciously on his right index fingernail.

“Eddie.” Richie again. “I thought you were avoiding me—”

A flash of irritation shot through Stan. *You don't own him*, he wanted to shout down the phone line, that’s all. *You’ve got no right to sound so—so—*

Brokenhearted. That was the word. Though he’d never thought of Richie as having a heart to break.

“You were right,” Stan said finally, his voice cold. “He still is. This is Stan.”

There was such a long silence that Stan wondered if Richie had dropped the phone.

“Hello?”

“I’m here.” Richie’s voice was crisp and cool as autumn leaves, all vulnerability gone. “If you’re calling me up just to chat, you must be lonelier than I thought.”

“Believe me, I wouldn’t be calling you if I had a choice. I’m doing this because of Eddie.”

"Is he all right?" Richie's voice was still crisp and cool but with an edge to it now, autumn leaves frosted with a sheen of hard ice. "If something's happened to him—"

"Nothing's happened to him." Stan fought to keep the anger out of his voice. As briefly as he could, he gave Richie a rundown of the night's events and Mike's resultant condition. Richie waited until he was done, then rapped out a set of short instructions. Stan listened in a daze and found himself nodding before realizing that of course Richie couldn't see him. He began to speak and realized he was listening to silence; the other boy had hung up. Wordlessly, Stan handed the phone to Eddie. "He's coming here."

Eddie sagged against the sink. "Now?"

"The others will be with him."

A harsh cry from the living room cut him off. Eddie's eyes widened. Stan felt the hair on his neck stand up like wires. "It's all right," he said, as soothingly as he could. "Jim wouldn't hurt Mike."

"He is hurting Mike. He has no choice," Eddie said. He was shaking his head. "That's how it always is these days. There's never any choice." Mike cried out again and Eddie gripped the edge of the counter. "I hate this!" he burst out. "I hate all of it! Always being scared, always being hunted, always wondering who's going to get hurt next. I wish I could go back to the way things used to be!"

"But you can't. None of us can," Stan said. "At least you can still go out in the daylight."

Eddie turned to him, lips parted, his eyes wide and dark. "Stan, I didn't mean—"

"I know you didn't." He backed away, feeling as if there were something caught in his throat. "I'm going to go see how they're doing." For a moment he thought Eddie might follow him, but he let the kitchen door fall shut between them without protest.

All the lights were on in the living room. Mike lay gray-faced on the couch, the blanket he had brought pulled up to his chest. He was

holding a wad of cloth against his right arm; the cloth was partly soaked through with blood. His eyes were shut.

“Where’s Jim?” Stan said, then winced, wondering if his tone was too harsh, too demanding. Mike looked awful, his eyes sunken into gray hollows, his mouth tight with pain. His eyes fluttered open and fixed on Stan.

“Stan,” he breathed. “Jim went outside to move the car off the lawn. He was worried about the neighbors.”

Stan glanced toward the window. He could see the sweep of the headlights grazing the house as Jim swung the car into the driveway. “How about you?” he asked. “Did he get those things out of your arm?”

Mike nodded dully. “I’m just so tired,” he whispered through cracked lips. “And—thirsty.”

“I’ll get you some water.” There was a pitcher of water and a stack of glasses on the sideboard next to the dining room table. Stan poured a glass full of the tepid liquid and brought it to Mike. His hands were shaking slightly and some of the water spilled as Mike took the glass. He was lifting his head, about to say something—Thank you, probably—when their fingers touched and he jerked back so hard that the glass went flying. It hit the edge of the coffee table and shattered, splashing water across the polished wood floor.

“Mike? Are you all right?”

Mike shrank away from him, his shoulders pressed against the back of the sofa, his lips pulled away from bared teeth.

His eyes had gone a luminous yellow. A low growl came from his throat, the sound of a cornered dog at bay.

“Mike?” Stan said again, appalled.

“*Vampire*,” he snarled.

He felt his head rock back as if Mike had punched him. “Mike—”

"I thought you were *human*. But you're a monster. A bloodsucking leech."

"I am human—I mean, I *was* human. I got turned. A few days ago." His mind was swimming; he felt dizzy and sick. "Just like you were —"

"Don't ever compare yourself to me!" Mike had struggled up into a sitting position, those ghastly yellow eyes still on Stan, scouring him with their disgust. "I'm still human, still alive—you're a dead thing that feeds on blood."

"Animal blood—"

"Just because you can't get human, or the Shadowhunters will burn you alive—"

"Mike," he said, and his name in his mouth was half fury and half a plea; he took a step toward Mike and his hand whipped out, nails shooting out like talons, suddenly impossibly long. They raked Stan's cheek, sending him staggering back, his hand clapped to his face. Blood coursed down his cheek, into his mouth. He tasted the salt of it and his stomach rumbled.

Mike was crouched on the sofa's arm now, his knees drawn up, clawed fingers leaving deep gouges in the gray velveteen. A low growl poured from his throat and his ears were long and flat against his head. When he bared his teeth, they were sharply jagged—not needle-thin like his own, but strong, whitely pointed canines. Mike had dropped the bloody cloth that had wrapped his arm and Stan could see the punctures where the spines had gone in, the glimmer of blood, welling, spilling—

A sharp pain in his lower lip told him that his fangs had slid from their sheaths. Some part of him wanted to fight Mike, to wrestle him down and puncture his skin with his own teeth, to gulp his hot blood. The rest of him felt as if it were screaming. Stan took a step back and then another, his hands out as if he could hold Mike back

Mike tensed to spring, just as the door to the kitchen flew open and Eddie burst into the room. He leaped onto the coffee table, landing

lightly as a cat. He held something in his hand, something that flashed a bright white-silver when he raised his arm. Stan saw that it was a dagger as elegantly curved as a bird's wing; a dagger that whipped past Mike's hair, millimeters from his face, and sank to the hilt in gray velveteen. Mike tried to pull away and gasped; the blade had gone through his sleeve and pinned it to the sofa.

Eddie yanked the blade back. It was one of Jim's. The moment he'd cracked open the kitchen door and gotten a look at what was going on in the living room, he'd made a beeline for the personal weapons stash he kept in his office. Mike might be weakened and sick, but he' looked mad enough to kill.

"What the hell is it with you?" As if from a distance, Eddie heard himself speaking, and the steel in his own voice astonished him. "Werewolves, vampires—you're both Downworlders."

"Werewolves don't hurt people, or each other. Vampires are murderers. One killed a boy down at the Hunter's Moon just the other day—"

"That wasn't a vampire." Eddie saw Mike blanch at the certainty in his voice. "And if you could stop blaming each other all the time for every bad thing that happens Downworld, maybe the Nephilim would start taking you seriously and actually *do* something about it." He turned to Stan. The vicious cuts across his cheek were already healing to silvery red lines. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." His voice was barely audible. Eddie could see the hurt in his eyes, and for a moment he wrestled the urge to call Mike a number of unprintable names. "I'm fine."

Eddie turned back to the werewolf boy. "You're lucky he's not as much of a bigot as you are, or I'd complain to the Clave and make the whole pack pay for your behavior." With a sharp tug, he yanked the knife loose, freeing Mike's T-shirt.

Mike bristled. "You don't get it. Vampires are what they are because they're infected with demon energies—"

"But that's the problem. The demon energies change us, make us different—you can call it a sickness or whatever you want, but the demons who created vampires and the demons who created werewolves came from species who were at war with each other. They hated each other, so it's in our blood to hate each other too. We can't help it. A werewolf and a vampire can never be friends because of it." He looked at Stan. His eyes were bright with anger and something else. "You'll start hating me soon enough," he said. "You'll hate Jim, too. You won't be able to help it."

"Hate *Jim*?" Stan was ashen, but before Eddie could reassure him, the front door banged open. He looked around, expecting Jim, but it wasn't Jim. It was Richie. He was all in black, two seraph blades stuck through the belt that circled his narrow hips. Bill and Eleven were just behind him, Eleven in a long, swirling cape that looked as if it were decorated with bits of crushed glass.

Richie's golden eyes, with the precision of a laser, fixed immediately on Eddie. If he'd thought Richie might look apologetic, concerned, or even ashamed after all that had happened, he was wrong. All he looked was angry. "What," he said, with a sharp and deliberate annoyance, "do you think you're doing?"

Eddie glanced down at himself. He was still perched on the coffee table, knife in hand. He fought the urge to hid it behind his back. "We had an incident. I took care of it."

"Really." Richie's voice dripped sarcasm. "Do you even know how to use that knife? Without poking a hole in yourself or any innocent bystanders?"

"I didn't hurt anyone," Eddie said between his teeth.

"He stabbed the couch," said Mike in a dull voice, his eyes falling shut. His cheeks were still flushed red with fever and rage, but the rest of his face was alarmingly pale.

Stan looked at him worriedly. "I think he's getting worse."

Eleven cleared her throat. When Stan didn't move, she said, "Get out of the way, mundane," in a tone of immense annoyance. She flung

her cloak back as she stalked across the room to where Mike lay on the couch. "I take it you're my patient?" she inquired, gazing down at him through glitter-crusted lashes.

Mike stared up at her with unfocused eyes.

"I'm Jane Ives," she went on in a soothing tone, stretching out her ringed hands. Blue sparks had begun to dance between them like bioluminescence dancing in water. "I'm the warlock who's here to cure you. Didn't they tell you I was coming?"

"I know who you are, but..." Mike looked dazed. "You look so ... so ... *shiny*."

Bill made a noise that sounded very much like a laugh stifled by a cough as Eleven's thin hands wove a shimmering blue curtain of magic around the werewolf girl.

Richie wasn't laughing. "Where," he asked, "is Jim?"

"He's outside," Stan said. "He was moving the truck off the lawn."

"Funny," Richie said. He didn't sound amused. "I didn't see him when we were coming up the stairs."

A thin tendril of panic unfurled like a leaf inside Eddie's chest. "Did you see his pickup?"

"I saw it," Bill said. "It w-was in the driveway. The lights w-were off."

At that even Eleven, intent on Mike, looked up. Through the net of enchantment she had woven around herself and the werewolf boy, her features seemed blurred and indistinct, as if she were looking at them through water. "I don't like it," she said, her voice sounding hollow and far away. "Not after a Drevak attack. They roam in packs."

Richie's hand was already reaching for one of his seraph blades. "I'll go check on him. Bill, you stay here, keep the house secure."

Eddie jumped down from the table. "I'm coming with you."

"No, you're not." He headed for the door, not glancing behind him to see if Eddie was following.

Eddie put on a burst of speed and threw himself between Richie and the front door. "Stop."

"I will knock you down if I have to, Edward."

"Stop calling me that."

"Eddie," he said in a low voice, and the sound of his name in his mouth was so intimate that a shudder ran up Eddie's spine. The gold in his eyes had turned hard, metallic. Eddie wondered for a moment if he might actually spring at him what it would be like if Richie struck him, knocked him down, grabbed his wrists even. Fighting to him was like sex to other people. The thought of him touching him like that brought the blood to his cheeks in a hot flood.

Eddie spoke around the breathless catch in his voice. "He's my uncle, not yours—"

"All you've got is that knife. It won't be much use if it's demons we're dealing with."

Eddie jammed the knife into the wall beside the door, point-first, and was rewarded by the look of surprise on his face. "So what? You've got two seraph blades; give me one."

"Oh, for the love of—" It was Stan, hands jammed into his pockets, eyes burning like black coals in his white face. "I'll go."

Eddie said, "Stan, don't—"

"At least I'm not wasting my time standing here flirting while we don't know what's happened to Jim." Stan gestured for him to move aside from the door.

Richie's lips thinned. "We'll *all* go." To Eddie's surprise he jerked a seraph blade out of his belt and handed it to him. "Take it."

"What's its name?" Eddie asked, moving away from the door.

“Nakir.”

Eddie had left his jacket in the kitchen, and the cold air sheeting off the East River cut through his thin shirt the moment he stepped out onto the dark porch. “Jim?” he called. “Jim!”

The truck was pulled up in the driveway, one of the doors hanging open. The roof light was on, shedding a faint glow. Richie frowned. “The keys are in the ignition. The car’s idling.”

Stan shut the front door behind them. “How do you know that?”

“I can hear it.” Richie looked at Stan speculatively. “And so could you if you tried, bloodsucker.” He loped down the stairs, a faint chuckle drifting behind him on the wind.

“I think I liked ‘mundane’ better than ‘bloodsucker,’” Stan muttered.

“With Richie, you don’t really get to choose your insulting nickname.” Eddie felt in his jeans pocket until his fingers encountered cool, smooth stone. He raised the witchlight in his hand, its glow raying out between his fingers like the light of a tiny sun. “Come on.”

Richie had been right; the truck *was* idling. Eddie smelled the exhaust as they approached, his heart sinking. Jim would never have left the car door open and the keys in the ignition like that unless something had happened.

Richie was circling the truck, frowning. “Bring that witchlight closer.” He knelt down in the grass, running his fingers lightly over it. From an inner pocket he drew an object Eddie recognized: a smooth piece of metal, engraved all over with delicate runes. A Sensor. Richie ran it over the grass and it obliged with a series of loud clicking noises, like a Geiger counter gone berserk. “Definite demonic action. I’m picking up heavy traces.”

“Could that be left over from the demon who attacked Mike?” Stan asked.

“The levels are too high. There’s been more than one demon here tonight.” Richie rose to his feet, all business. “Maybe you two should

go back inside. Send Bill out here. He's dealt with this sort of thing before."

"Richie—" Eddie was furious all over again. He broke off as something caught his eye. It was a flicker of movement, across the street, down by the cement rock-strewn bank of the East River. There was something about the movement—an angle as a gesture caught the light, something too quick, too elongated to be human...

Eddie flung an arm out, pointing. "Look! By the water!"

Richie's gaze followed his and he sucked in his breath. Then he was running, and they were running after him, over the asphalt of Kent Street and onto the scrubby grass that bordered the waterfront. The witchlight swung in Eddie's hand as he ran, lighting bits of the riverbank with haphazard illumination: a patch of weeds there, a jut of broken concrete that nearly tripped him up, a heap of trash and broken glass—and then, as they came in clear sight of the lapping water, the crumpled figure of a man.

It was Jim—Eddie saw that instantly, though the two dark, humped shapes crouching over him blocked his face from Eddie. He was on his back, so close to the water that Eddie wondered for a panicked moment if the hunched creatures were holding him under, trying to drown him. Then they drew back, hissing through perfectly circular lipless mouths, and Eddie saw that his head was resting on the gravelly riverbank. His face was slack and gray.

"Raum demons," Richie whispered.

Stan's eyes were wide. "Are those the same things that attacked Mike —?"

"No. These are much worse." Richie gestured at Stan and Eddie to get behind him. "You two, stay back." He raised his seraph blade. "*Israfiel!*" he cried, and there was a sudden hot burst of light as it blazed up. Richie leaped forward, sweeping his weapon at the nearest of the demons. In the light of the seraph blade, the demon's appearance was unpleasantly visible: dead-white, scaled skin, a black hole for a mouth, bulging, toadlike eyes, and arms that ended in tentacles where hands should have been. It lashed out now with

those tentacles, whipping them at Richie with incredible speed.

Richie knocked the injured demon down and they were tumbling together across the rocks at the river's edge. The glow of Richie's seraph blade sent elegant arcs of light shattering across the water as he writhed and twisted to avoid the creature's remaining tentacles—not to mention the black blood spraying from its severed wrist. Eddie hesitated—should he go to Jim or run to help Richie?—and in that moment of hesitation he heard Stan shout, “Eddie, watch out!” and turned to see the second demon lunging straight at him.

16. As Time Goes By

There was no time to reach for the seraph blade at his belt, no time to remember and shout out its name. Eddie threw his hands out and the demon struck him, knocking him backward. He went down with a cry, hitting his shoulder painfully against the uneven ground. Slick tentacles rasped against his skin. One braceleted his arm, squeezing painfully; the other whipped forward, wrapping his throat.

He grabbed frantically at his neck trying to pull the lashing, flexible limb away from his windpipe. Already his lungs were aching. He kicked and twisted—

And suddenly the pressure was gone; the thing was off him. Eddie sucked in a whistling breath and rolled to his knees. The demon was in a half crouch, staring at him with black, pupil-less eyes. Getting ready to lunge again? He grabbed for his blade, spat: “*Nakir*,” and a spear of light shot from his fingers. He’d never held an angel knife before. The hilt of it trembled and vibrated in his hand; it felt alive. “*NAKIR!*” he cried, staggering to his feet, the blade outstretched and pointed at the Raum demon.

To his surprise, the demon skittered backward, tentacles waving, almost as if it were—but this wasn’t possible—afraid of him. He saw Stan, running toward him, a length of what looked like steel pipe in his hand; behind him, Richie was getting to his knees. Eddie couldn’t see the demon he’d been fighting; perhaps he’d killed it. As for the second Raum demon, its mouth was open and it was making a distressed, hooting noise, like a monstrous owl. Abruptly, it turned and, with tentacles waving, dashed toward the bank and leaped into the river. A gush of blackish water splashed upward, and then the demon was gone, vanishing beneath the river’s surface without even a telltale spray of bubbles to mark its place.

Richie reached his side just as it vanished. He was bent over, panting, smeared with black demon blood. “What—happened?” he demanded between gasps for breath.

“I don’t know,” Eddie admitted. “It came at me—I tried to fight it off but it was too fast—and then it just left. Like it saw something that

scared it.”

“Are you all right?” It was Stan, skidding to a stop in front of him, not panting—he didn’t breathe anymore, Eddie reminded herself—but anxious, clutching a thick length of pipe in his hand.

“Where did you get that?” Richie demanded.

“I wrenched it off the side of a telephone pole.” Stan looked as if the recollection surprised him. “I guess you can do anything when your adrenaline is up.”

“Or when you have the unholy strength of the damned,” Richie said.

“Oh, shut up, both of you,” snapped Eddie, earning himself a martyred look from Stan and a leer from Richie. He pushed past the two of them, heading for the riverbank. “Or have you forgotten about Jim?”

Jim was still unconscious, but breathing. He was as pale as Mike had been, and his sleeve was torn across the shoulder. When Eddie drew the blood-stiffened fabric away from the skin, working as gingerly as he could, he saw that across Jim’s shoulder was a cluster of circular red wounds where a tentacle had gripped him. Each was oozing a mixture of blood and blackish fluid. Eddie sucked in his breath. “We have to get him inside.”

Eleven was waiting for them on the front porch when Stan and Richie carried Jim, slumped between them, up the stairs. Having finished with Mike, Eleven had put him to bed in Jim’s room, so they set Jim down on the sofa where he’d been lying and let Eleven go to work on him.

“Will he be all right?” Eddie demanded, hovering around the couch. Eleven summoned blue fire that shimmered between her hands.

“He’ll be fine. Raum poison is a little more complex than a Drevak sting, but nothing I can’t handle.” Eleven motioned him away. “At least not if you get back and let me work.”

Reluctantly, he sank down into an armchair. Richie and Bill were over by the window, heads close together. Richie was gesturing with

his hands. Eddie guessed he was explaining to Bill what had happened with the demons. Stan, leaning against the wall beside the kitchen door, was talking on his phone with Beverly, telling her what happened. Eddie didn't know where she was, probably still at Eleven's. That meant she and Ben were... together...*alone*.

Eddie pushed that thought away. He turned back to see Eleven getting to her feet. The blue light was gone. Jim's eyes were still closed but the ugly grayish tint had gone from his skin, and his breathing was deep and regular.

"He's all right!" Eddie exclaimed, and Bill, Richie, and Stan came hurrying over to have a look. He put a hand in Eddie's shoulder, and he didn't moved him away.

"So he'll live?" Stan said, as Eleven sank down onto the armrest of the nearest chair. She looked exhausted, drawn and bluish. "You're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure," Eleven said. "I'm the High Witch of Brooklyn; I know what I'm doing. Which reminds me," Eleven went on, sounding stiff—and Eddie had never heard her sound stiff before—"that I'm not exactly sure what it is you think you're doing, calling on me every time one of you has so much as an ingrown toenail that needs clipping. As High Witch, my time is valuable. There are plenty of lesser warlocks who'd be happy to do a job for you at a greatly reduced rate."

Eddie blinked at her in surprise. "You're charging us? But Jim is a friend!"

"Not a friend of mine," she said. "I met him only on the few occasions when your mother brought him along when your memory spells were being refreshed." She passed a hand across her shiny hair. "Did you think I was helping you out of the goodness of my heart? Or am I just the only warlock you happen to know?"

Richie had listened to this short speech with a smolder of fury sparking his amber eyes to gold. "No," he said now, "but you *are* the only warlock we know who happens to be living with a friend of ours."

Eleven raised an eyebrow. "I wouldn't call it 'living'. It's more of a... quaint gathering."

"That's the same thing." Stan said.

"Guys, enough. Let it alone." Eddie gave an exasperated sigh.

"Let what alone?" Jim inquired. Eddie whirled around to find him sitting up on the couch, wincing a little with pain but looking otherwise healthy enough.

"Jim!" Eddie darted to the side of the sofa, considered hugging him, saw the way he was holding his shoulder, and decided against it. "Do you remember what happened?"

"Not really." Jim passed a hand across his face. "The last thing I remember was going out to the truck. Something hit my shoulder and jerked me sideways. I remember the most incredible pain—Anyway, I must have passed out after that. The next thing I knew I was listening to five people shouting. What was all that about, anyway?"

"Nothing," chorused Eddie, Stan, Bill, Eleven, and Richie, in surprising and probably never-to-be-repeated unison.

Despite his obvious exhaustion, Jim's eyebrows shot up. But "I see," was all he said.

In the dream, all Beverly could feel was the sense of warmth. She danced through whirling smoke down a corridor lined with mirrors, and each mirror she passed showed her a different face. She could hear lovely, haunting music. It seemed to come from some distance away, and yet was all around. There was a man walking ahead of her—a boy, really, slender and beardless—but though she felt that she knew him, she could neither see his face nor recognize him. He might have been Eddie, or Stan, or someone else entirely. She followed, calling to him, but he receded down the corridor as if the smoke carried him with it. The music rose and rose to a crescendo—

And Beverly woke, breathing hard, her phone sliding off her lap as she sat up. The dream was gone, but the music remained, high and

haunting and sweet. She looked around, realizing she was still at Eleven's loft. She had fallen asleep on the couch without even realizing it.

She made her way to the door and peered out into the hallway. The music was louder in the corridor. In fact, it was coming from the room across the hall. Ben's room. The door was ajar slightly, and notes seemed to pour through the opening like water through the narrow neck of a vase.

She crossed the corridor and put her hand gently to the door; it swung open under her touch. The room within was dark, lit only by moonlight. Ben was sitting on the bed, eyes closed, with a violin propped against his shoulder. His cheek rested against the instrument, and the bow sawed back and forth over the strings, wringing notes out of it, notes as fine and perfect as anything Beverly had ever heard.

"Do you need anything?" he said, without opening his eyes or ceasing to play. "It's not polite to stare."

"I'm sorry for interrupting." Beverly said, clearing her throat. The noise sounded terribly harsh to her, and loud in the silence of the room; she wanted to cringe. "I'll just...go."

"No, it's fine." Ben said. "I can't sleep anyway."

"I didn't know you played," She pointed at the violin.

"I found it on Eleven's room," Ben said. "My father taught me when I was a kid," He lowered the violin from his shoulder.

"You mean Pennywise," She said.

Ben looked at her, as if he wanted to say something important, but then thought better of it. "Yeah."

She stared at Ben's hands. They were slender and long, and he had the same design on the back of his hand that Richie and Bill did, the open eye. She pointed at it. "What's that meant to do?"

Ben seemed not to notice she had changed the subject. He held his

hand out to her, palm down. "This one is the Voyance. It clears our Sight. Helps us to see Downworld." He turned his hand over, and drew up the sleeve of his shirt. All along the pale inside of his wrist and inner arm were more of the Marks, very black against his white skin. They seemed to thread with the pattern of his veins, as if his blood ran through the Marks, too. "For swiftness, night vision, angelic power, to heal quickly," he read out loud. "Though their names are more complex than that, and not in English."

"Do they hurt?"

"They hurt when I received them. They don't hurt at all now." He drew his sleeve down and smiled at her. "Now, don't tell me that's all the questions you have."

Oh, I have more than you think. "Why can't you sleep?"

She saw that she had caught him off guard; a look of hesitancy flashed across his face before he spoke. But why hesitate? she thought. He could always lie, or simply deflect. But he, she sensed instinctively, wouldn't lie. "I have bad dreams."

"I was dreaming too," she said. "I dreamed about your music."

He grinned. "A nightmare, then?"

"Oh, no," Beverly held up her hands. "It was actually really good."

"If I was Richie, I would brag for days that a girl complimented on my music." Ben gave her a sad smile. "But thank you."

"What were your dreams about?" Beverly entered the room, it wasn't as messy as it had been before.

Ben shrugged. "The prison, my father, *everything*."

Beverly didn't say anything else, she didn't know *what* to say. In the few days she had known Ben, she realized he was a guy who got influenced frequently, that's one of the things he and Eddie had in common. Beverly didn't want to say the wrong thing and then regret it.

"That sucks," she said and pulled out her phone from her pocket to stare at the screen. 8:21 p.m.

She had two missed calls from her dad and one text of her mom. Practically saying they will get home late. As the last fifteen texts she had received days before. She resisted the urge to throw her phone to the wall.

But Ben seemed to notice. "Something's bothering you," he observed. "What is it?"

"Other than the fact that my best friend is now an immortal bloodsucker creature who can't even walk in the sunlight anymore?"

Ben chuckled. "Sometimes I think you're more sarcastic than Richie."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

Beverly looked at him. He was wearing that look she found so strange and compelling—that amusement that didn't seem to pass beyond the surface of his features, as if he found everything in the world both infinitely funny and infinitely tragic all at the same time. She wondered what had made him this way. Perhaps it was something he had learned from his parents—but which parents?

Her own breath was very short when she said, softly, "Ben."

"Yes?" Amusement glittered in his eyes.

With a sort of horror Beverly realized that she had simply said his name for the sake of saying it; she hadn't actually had a question. Hastily she said, "How do you learn—to fight like you do? To draw those Marks, and the rest of it?"

Ben smiled. "Keene provided our schooling and physical training. Didn't Eddie tell you that?"

Beverly shrugged. "They were all focused on that whole Pennywise thing and no one bothered to fully explain me everything. Eleven told me all about Downworlders but, of Shadowhunters, I only know bits and pieces."

Ben got under the bed and pulled out a large squarish book bound in dark blue velvet. There was a pattern cut into the velvet, a swirling symbol reminiscent of the marks that decorated Ben's skin. The title was stamped on the front in silver: *The Shadowhunter's Codex*. Beverly glanced up at Ben.

"I got it from the Institute," Ben explained. "Sharon gave it to me, when they adopted me, and I'm supposed to give it to Georgie once he gets older."

"But, what is it?"

Ben handed it to Beverly, it felt cold when she touched her. "That book will tell you anything you want to know—about us, about our history, even about Downworlders like you." Ben's face turned grave. "Be careful with it, though. It's six hundred years old and the only copy of its kind. Losing or damaging it is punishable by death under the Law."

Beverly thrust the book away from her as if it were on fire. "You can't be serious."

"You're right. I'm not." Ben stood up. "You do believe everything I say, though, don't you? Do I seem unusually trustworthy to you, or are you just naïve?"

Instead of replying, Beverly scowled at him and stalked across the room toward one of the stone benches inside a window alcove. Throwing herself down onto the seat, she opened the Codex and began to read, studiously ignoring Ben even as he moved to sit beside her. She could feel the weight of his gaze on her as she read.

The first page of the Nephilim book showed the same image she'd grown used to seeing on the tapestries in the corridors of the Institute: the angel rising out of the lake, holding a sword in one hand and a cup in the other. Underneath the illustration was a note: *The Angel Raziel and the Mortal Instruments*.

"That's how it all began," Ben said cheerfully, as if oblivious to the fact that she was ignoring him. "A summoning spell here, a bit of angel blood there, and you've a recipe for indestructible human

warriors. You'll never understand us from reading a book, mind you, but it's a start."

"Hardly human—more like avenging angels." Beverly said softly, turning the pages. There were dozens of pictures of angels—tumbling out of the sky, shedding feathers as a star might shed sparks as it fell. There were more images of the Angel Raziel, holding open a book on whose pages runes burned like fire, and there were men kneeling around him, men on whose skin Marks could be seen. Images of men like the one she'd seen in a nightmare, with missing eyes and sewed-shut lips; images of Shadowhunters brandishing flaming swords, like warrior angels out of Heaven.

The next pages were devoted to the other gifts Raziel had given the first Shadowhunters—powerful magical objects called the Mortal Instruments—and a home country: a tiny piece of land sliced out of what was then the Holy Roman Empire, surrounded with wardings so that mundanes could not enter it. It was called Derry.

"That's where you lived, right?" Beverly asked, not taking her eyes off the page. "With Pennywise?" But when she looked up, Ben wasn't there anymore. Beverly could see the door of his room already closed. With an exasperated sigh, she left the book on the bench and walked off the loft. Not even bothering to say goodbye.

Since Mike was still asleep in Jim's bedroom, he announced that he'd be just fine on the couch. Eddie tried to give him the bed in his own room, but he refused to take it. Giving up, Eddie headed into the narrow hallway to retrieve sheets and blankets from the linen closet. He was dragging a comforter down from a high shelf when he sensed someone behind him. Eddie whirled, dropping the blanket he'd been holding into a soft pile at his feet.

It was Richie. "Sorry to startle you."

"It's fine." Eddie bent to retrieve the blanket.

"Actually, I'm not sorry," he said. "That's the most emotion I've seen from you in days."

"I haven't seen you in days."

"And whose fault is that? I've called you. You don't pick up the phone."

Eddie sighed. "Aren't you supposed to be leaving with Bill?"

His mouth twisted and Eddie saw something fracture behind his eyes, a starburst of pain. "Can't wait to get rid of me?"

"No." Eddie hugged the blanket against himself and stared down at his hands, unable to meet his eyes. The yearning to touch him was so bad Eddie wanted to let go of the blankets and scream. "I mean, no, it's not that. I don't hate you, Richie."

"I don't hate you, either."

Eddie looked up at him, relieved. "I'm glad to hear that—"

"I wish I could hate you," he said. His voice was light, his mouth curved in an unconcerned hasmile, his eyes sick with misery. "I want to hate you. I try to hate you. It would be so much easier if I did hate you. Sometimes I think I do hate you and then I see you and I—"

Eddie's hands had grown numb with their grip on the blanket. "And you what?"

"What do you *think*?" Richie shook his head. "Why should I tell you everything about how I feel when you never tell me anything? It's like banging my head on a wall, except at least if I were banging my head on a wall, I'd be able to make myself stop."

Eddie's lips were trembling so violently that he found it hard to speak. "Do you think it's easy for me?" he demanded. "Do you think —"

"Eddie?" It was Stan, coming into the hallway with that new soundless grace of his, startling Eddie so badly that he dropped the blanket again. He turned aside, but not fast enough to hide his expression from Stan, or the telltale shine in his eyes. "I see," Stan said, after a long pause. "Sorry to interrupt." He vanished back into the living room, leaving Eddie staring after him through a wavering

lens of tears.

"*Damn* it." Eddie turned on Richie. "What is it about you?" he said, with more savagery than he'd intended. "Why do you have to ruin *everything*?" He shoved the blanket at Richie hastily and darted out of the room after Stan.

Stan was already out the front door. Eddie caught up to him on the porch, letting the front door bang shut behind him. "Stan! Where are you going?"

He turned around almost reluctantly. "Home. It's late—I don't want to get caught here with the sun coming up."

Since the sun wasn't coming up for hours, this struck Eddie as a feeble excuse. "You know you're welcome to stay and sleep here during the day if you want to avoid your mom. You can sleep in my room—"

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"Please, Stan. You need to understand—"

"I understand." Stan said. "At least you're being honest."

Eddie shoved his hands into his pockets, watching Stan as he walked away until he was swallowed up by the darkness.

17. A Bird in a Gilded Cage

Notes for the Chapter:

A Ben-centric chapter bc why not

Ben was halfway through the third section of the song when he saw a light sweep across Eleven's front lawn. It cut off a moment later, plunging the view from the front window into darkness, but Ben was already on his feet and reaching for his jacket.

He closed Eleven's front door behind him soundlessly and loped down the front steps two at a time. On the lawn by the footpath was a motorcycle, the engine still rumbling. It had a weirdly organic look to it: Pipes like ropy veins wound up and over the chassis, and the single headlight, now dim, resembled a gleaming eye. In a way, it looked as alive as the boy who was leaning against the cycle, looking at Ben curiously. He was wearing a brown leather jacket and his dark hair curled down to the collar of it and fell over his narrowed eyes. He was grinning, exposing pointed white teeth. Of course, Ben thought, neither the boy nor the motorcycle was really alive; they both ran on demon energies, fed by the night.

"Adrian," Ben said, by way of greeting.

"You see," Adrian said, "I have brought it, as you asked me to."

"I see that."

"Though, I might add, I have been very curious as to why you should want such a thing as a demonic motorcycle. They are not exactly Covenant, for one thing, and for another, it is rumored you already have one."

"Richie has one," Ben admitted, circling the cycle so as to examine it from all angles. "But it's on the roof of the Institute, and I can't get to it right now."

Adrian chuckled softly. "It seems we're both unwelcome at the Institute."

"You bloodsuckers still on the Most Wanted list?"

Adrian leaned to the side and spit, delicately, onto the ground. "They accuse us of murders," he said angrily. "The death of the were-creature, the faerie, even the warlock, though I have told them we do not drink warlock blood. It is bitter and can work strange changes in those who consume it."

"You told Sharon this?"

"Sharon." Adrian's eyes glittered. "I could not speak with her if I wanted to. All decisions are made through the Inquisitor now, all inquiries and requests routed through her. It is a bad situation, friend, a bad situation."

"You're telling me," said Ben. "And we're not friends. I agreed not to tell the Clave what happened with Stan because I needed your help. Not because I like you. Are you going to let me have the bike, or not? I've only got a few hours until sunrise."

"I take it that means you're not going to give me a ride home?" Adrian moved gracefully away from the motorcycle; as he moved, Ben caught the bright glint of the gold chain around his throat.

"Nope." Ben climbed onto the bike. "But you can sleep in the cellar under the house if you're worried about sunrise."

"Mmm." Adrian seemed thoughtful; he was a few inches shorter than Ben, and though he looked younger physically, his eyes were much older. "So are we even for Stan now, Shadowhunter?"

Ben gunned the bike, turning it toward the river. "We'll never be even, bloodsucker, but at least this is a start."

Ben hadn't ridden a cycle since he was fifteen, but he still remembered how to ride one. He was caught short by the icy wind that arced off the river, piercing his thin jacket and the denim of his jeans with dozens of icetipped needles of cold. Ben shivered, glad that at least he had worn leather gloves to protect his hands.

He banked the cycle viciously and felt it lurch sideways; he thought he saw his own shadow flung against the water, tilted crazily to the side. As he righted himself, he saw it: a ship with black metal sides, unmarked and almost lightless, its prow a narrow blade scything the water ahead. It reminded him of a shark, lean and quick and deadly.

He braked and drifted carefully downward, soundless, a leaf caught in a tide. He didn't feel as if he were falling, more as if the ship were lifting itself to meet him, buoyed on a rising current. The wheels of the cycle touched down onto the deck and he glided slowly to a stop. There was no need to cut the engine; he swung his legs off the cycle and its rumble subsided to a growl, then a purr, then silence. When he glanced back at it, it looked a little as if it were glowering at him, like an unhappy dog after being told to stay.

He grinned at it. "I'll be back for you," he said. "I've got to check out this boat first."

There was a lot to check out. He was standing on a wide deck, the water to his left. Everything was painted black: the deck, the metal guardrail that encircled it; even the windows in the long, narrow cabin were blacked out. The boat was bigger than he'd expected it to be: probably the length of a football field, maybe more. It wasn't like any ship he'd ever seen before: too big to be a yacht, too small to be a naval vessel, and he'd never seen a ship where everything was painted black. Ben wondered where his father had gotten it.

Leaving the bike, he started a slow circuit around the deck. The clouds had cleared and the stars shone down, impossibly bright. He could see the city illuminated on both sides of him as if he stood in an empty narrow-walled passage made of light. His boots echoed hollowly against the deck. He wondered suddenly if Pennywise was even here.

Ben had rarely been anywhere that seemed so thoroughly deserted. He paused for a moment at the bow of the boat, looking out over the river that sliced between Manhattan and Long Island like a scar. The water was churned to gray peaks, lashed with silver along their tops, and a strong and steady wind was blowing, the kind of wind that blew only across water. He stretched his arms out and let the wind take his jacket and blow it back like wings, whip his hair across his

face, sting his eyes to tears.

There had been a lake by the manor house in Derry. His father had taught him to sail on it, taught him the language of wind and water, of buoyancy and air. All men should know how to sail, he had said. It was one of the few times he'd ever spoken like that, saying all men and not all Shadowhunters. It was a brief reminder that whatever else Ben might be, he was still part of the human race.

Turning away from the bow with his eyes stinging, Ben saw a door set into the wall of the cabin between two blacked-out windows. Crossing the deck quickly, he tried the handle; it was locked. With his stele, he carved a quick set of Opening runes into the metal and the door swung open, the hinges shrieking in protest and shedding red flakes of rust. Ben ducked under the low doorway and found himself in a dimly lit metal stairwell. The air smelled of rust and disuse. He took another step forward and the door shut behind him with an echoing metallic slam, plunging him into darkness.

He swore, feeling for the witchlight rune-stone in his pocket. His gloves felt suddenly clunky, his fingers stiff with cold. He was colder inside than he had been out on the deck. The air was like ice. He drew his hand out of his pocket, shivering, and not just from the temperature. The hair along the back of his neck was prickling, his every nerve screaming. Something was wrong.

He raised the rune-stone and it flared into light, making his eyes water even more. Through the blur he saw the slender figure of a girl standing in front of him, her hands clasped across her chest, her hair a splash of red color against the black metal all around them. His hand shook, scattering leaping darts of witchlight as if a host of fireflies had risen out of the darkness below. "*Beverly?*"

She stared at him, white-faced, her lips trembling. Questions died in his throat—what was she doing here? How had she gotten to the ship? A spasm of terror gripped him, worse than any fear he'd ever felt for himself. Something was wrong with her, with Beverly. He took a step forward, just as she moved her hands away from her chest and held them out to him. They were sticky with blood. Blood covered the front of her white dress like a scarlet bib.

He caught her with one arm as she sagged forward. He nearly dropped the witchlight as her weight fell against him. He could feel the beat of her heart, the brush of her soft hair against his chin, so familiar. The scent of her was different, though. That scent he associated with Beverly, a mix of floral soap and clean cotton, was gone; he smelled only blood and metal. Her head tilted back, her eyes rolling up to the whites. The wild beating of her heart was slowing—stopping—

"No!" He shook her, hard enough that her head rolled against his arm. "Beverly! Wake up!" He shook her again, and this time her lashes fluttered; he felt his relief like a sudden cold sweat, and then her eyes were open, but they were no longer blue; they were an opaque and glowing white, white and blinding as headlights on a dark road, white as the clamoring noise inside his own mind. I've seen those eyes before, he thought, and then darkness surged up over him like a wave, bringing silence with it.

There were holes punched into the darkness, glimmering dots of light against shadow. Ben closed his eyes, trying to calm his own breathing. There was a coppery taste in his mouth, like blood, and he could tell that he was lying on a cold metal surface and that the chill was seeping through his clothes and into his skin. He counted backward from one hundred inside his head until his breathing slowed. Then he opened his eyes again. The darkness was still there, but it had resolved itself into familiar night sky punctuated by stars. He was on the deck of the ship, flat on his back in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge, which loomed at the ship's bow like a gray mountain of metal and stone. He groaned and lifted himself onto his elbows—then froze as he became aware of another shadow, this one recognizably human, leaning over him. "That was a nasty knock to the head you got," said the voice that haunted his nightmares. "How do you feel?"

Ben sat up and immediately regretted it as his stomach lurched. If he'd eaten anything in the past ten hours, he was fairly sure he would have thrown it up. As it was, the sour taste of bile flooded his mouth. "I feel like hell."

Pennywise smiled. He was sitting on a stack of empty, flattened boxes, wearing a neat gray suit and tie, as if he were seated behind the elegant mahogany desk at the Wayland manor house in Derry. "I have another obvious question for you. How did you find me?"

"Richie tortured it out of your Raum demon," said Ben. "He saw the shadow of your boat on the water. He told me you'd summoned it too, but I already knew that."

"Richard Tozier?" Pennywise stroked his chin. "Interesting. I should've never underestimate a Tozier. But then again, Wentworth wasn't exactly a fighter."

"You sent those men to kill Richie's father, didn't you?" Ben said, fury coming out of his mouth. "Why would you do that?"

Pennywise didn't answer, he seemed to be hiding a smile. "Next time you should at least tell me you're coming before you drop by. It would save you a nasty run-in with my guards."

"Guards?" Ben propped himself against the cold metal railing and took in deep breaths of clean, cold air. "You mean demons, don't you? You used the Sword to summon them."

"I don't deny that," Pennywise said. "Jimothy's beasts shattered my army of Forsaken, and I had neither time nor inclination to create more. Now that I have the Mortal Sword, I no longer need them. I have others."

Ben thought of Beverly, bloody and dying in his arms. He put a hand to his forehead. It was cool where the metal railing had touched it. "That thing in the stairwell," he said. "It wasn't Beverly, was it?"

"Beverly?" Pennywise sounded mildly surprised. "Marsh?"

"How do you know her name?" Ben demanded, suddenly terrified.

Pennywise shrugged his shoulders, even a informal movement seemed strange on him. "I know many things. Is she the one you saw?"

"Why wouldn't it be what I saw?" Ben struggled to keep his voice flat,

nonchalant. He wasn't unfamiliar or uncomfortable with secrets—either his own or other people's.

But this was Pennywise. He looked at everything closely, studying it, analyzing in what way it could be turned to his advantage. In that way he reminded Ben of the Queen of the Seelie Court: cool, menacing, calculating.

"What you encountered in the stairwell," Pennywise said, "was Agramon—the Demon of Fear. Agramon takes the form of whatever most terrifies you. When it is done feeding on your terror, it kills you, presuming you are still alive at that point. Most men—and women—die of fear before that. You are to be congratulated for holding out as long as you did."

"Agramon?" Ben was astonished. "That's a Greater Demon. Where did you get hold of that?"

"I paid a young and hubristic warlock to summon it for me. He thought that if the demon remained inside his pentagram, he could control it. Unfortunately for him, his greatest fear was that a demon he summoned would break the wards of the pentagram and attack him, and that's exactly what happened when Agramon came through."

"So that's how he died," Ben said.

"How who died?"

"The warlock," Ben said. "His name was Elias. He was sixteen. But you knew that, didn't you? The Ritual of Infernal Conversion—"

Pennywise laughed. "You *have* been busy, haven't you? So you know why I sent those demons to Jimothy's house, don't you?"

"You wanted Mike," said Ben. "Because he's a werewolf child. You need his blood."

"I sent the Drevak demons to spy out what there was to see at Jimothy's and report back to me," Pennywise said. "Jimothy killed one of them, but when the other reported the presence of a young lycanthrope—"

"You sent the Raum demons to take Mike." Ben felt suddenly very tired. "Because Jim is fond of him and you wanted to hurt him if you could." He paused, and then said, in a measured tone: "Which is pretty low, even for you."

For a moment a spark of anger lit Pennywise's eyes; then he threw his head back and roared with mirth. "I admire your stubbornness. It's so much like mine." He got to his feet then and held a hand out for Ben to take. "Come. Walk around the deck with me. There's something I want to show you."

Ben wanted to spurn the offered hand, but wasn't sure, considering the pain in his head, that he could make it to his feet unaided. Besides, it was probably better not to anger his father so soon; whatever Pennywise might say about prizing Ben's rebelliousness, he had never had much patience with disobedient behavior. Pennywise's hand was cool and dry, his grip oddly reassuring. When Ben was on his feet, Pennywise released his hold and drew a stele out of his pocket. "Let me take those injuries away," he said, reaching out for his son.

Ben drew away—after a second's hesitation that Pennywise would surely have noticed. "I don't want your help."

Pennywise put the stele away. "As you like." He began to walk, and Ben, after a moment, followed him, jogging to catch up. He knew his father well enough to know he would never turn around to see if Ben had pursued him, but would just expect that he had and begin talking accordingly.

He was right. By the time Ben reached his father's side, Pennywise had already started speaking. He had his hands loosely clasped behind his back and moved with an easy, careless grace, unusual in a big, broad-shouldered man. He leaned forward as he walked, almost as if he were striding into a heavy wind.

"...if I recall correctly," Pennywise was saying, "you are in fact familiar with Milton's *Paradise Lost*?"

"You only made me read it ten or fifteen times," said Ben. "It's better to reign in hell than serve in heaven, etcetera, and so on."

"*Non serviam*," said Pennywise. " 'I will not serve.' It's what Lucifer had inscribed upon his banner when he rode with his host of rebel angels against a corrupt authority."

"What's your point? That you're on the devil's side?"

"Some say Milton was on the devil's side himself. His Satan is certainly a more interesting figure than his God." They had nearly reached the front of the ship. He stopped and leaned against the guardrail.

Ben joined him there. They had passed the bridges of the East River and were heading out into the open water between Staten Island and Manhattan. The lights of the downtown financial district shimmered like witchlight on the water. The sky was powdered with diamond dust and the river hid its secrets under a slick black sheet, broken here and there with a silvery flash that could have been a fish's tail—or a mermaid's. *My city*, Ben thought, experimentally, but the words still brought to mind Alicante and its crystal towers, not the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

After a moment Pennywise said, "Why are you here, Ben? I wondered after I saw you in the Bone City if your hatred for me was implacable. I had nearly given up on you."

His tone was level, as it almost always was, but there was something in it—not vulnerability but at least a sort of genuine curiosity, as if he had realized that Ben was capable of surprising him.

Ben looked out at the water. "The Queen of the Seelie Court wanted me to ask you a question," he said. "She told me to ask you what blood runs in my veins."

Surprise passed over Pennywise's face like a hand smoothing away all expression. "You spoke with the Queen?"

Ben said nothing.

"It is the way of the Folk. Everything they say has more than one meaning. Tell her, if she asks again, that the blood of the Angel runs in your veins."

"And in every Shadowhunter's veins," said Ben, disappointed. He'd hoped for a better answer. "You wouldn't lie to the Queen of the Seelie Court, would you?"

Pennywise's tone was short. "No. And you wouldn't come here just to ask me that ridiculous question. Why are you really here, Ben?"

"I had to talk to someone." He wasn't as good at controlling his voice as his father was; he could hear the pain in it, like a bleeding wound just under the surface. "The Denbroughs—I'm nothing but trouble for them. Beverly must hate me by now. The Inquisitor wants me dead. Bill and Richie won't talk to me, and I don't even know why."

"And your brother?" Pennywise said. "What about Edward?"

You think everyone who isn't just like you is better off dead. "He's got his own issues." He hesitated. "I remembered what you said at the Bone City. That you never got a chance to tell me the truth. I don't trust you," he added. "I want you to know that. But I thought I'd give you the chance to tell me *why*."

"You have to ask me more than why, Ben." There was a note in his father's voice that startled Ben—a fierce humility that seemed to temper Pennywise's pride, as steel might be tempered by fire. "There are so many whys."

"Why did you kill the Silent Brothers? Why did you take the Mortal Sword? What are you planning? Why wasn't the Mortal Cup *enough* for you?" Ben caught himself before he could ask any more questions. *Why did you leave me a second time? Why did you tell me I wasn't your son anymore, then come back for me anyway?*

"You know what I want. The Clave is hopelessly corrupt and must be destroyed and built again. Derry must be freed from the influence of the degenerate races, and Earth made proof against the demonic threat."

"Yeah, about that demonic threat." Ben glanced around, as if he half-expected to see the black shadow of Agramon hulking toward him. "I thought you hated demons. Now you use them like servants. The Ravener, the Drevak demons, Agramon—they're your *employees* .

Guards, butler—personal chef, for all I know.”

Pennywise tapped his fingers on the railing. “I’m no friend to demons,” he said. “I am Nephilim, no matter how much I might think the Covenant is useless and the Law fraudulent. A man doesn’t have to agree with his government to be a patriot, does he? It takes a true patriot to dissent, to say he loves his country more than he cares for his own place in the social order. I’ve been vilified for my choice, forced into hiding, banished from Derry. But I am—I will always be—Nephilim. I can’t change the blood in my veins if I wished to—and I don’t.”

Ben glanced down at the dark water again, knowing it wasn’t true. To give up the hunt, the kill, the knowledge of one’s own soaring speed and sure abilities: It was impossible. He *was* a warrior. He could be nothing else.

“Do you?” Pennywise asked. Ben looked away quickly, wondering if his father could read his face. It had been just the two of them alone for so many years. He’d known his father’s face better than his own, once. Pennywise was the one person from whom he felt he could never hide what he was feeling. Or the first person, at least.

“No,” he said. “I don’t.”

“You’re a Shadowhunter forever?”

“I am,” Ben said, “in the end, what you made me.”

“Good,” said Pennywise. “That’s what I wanted to hear.” He leaned back against the railing, looking up at the night sky. There was gray in his silvery white hair; Ben had never noticed it before. “This is a war,” Pennywise said. “The only question is, what side will you fight on?”

“I thought we were all on the same side. I thought it was us against the demon worlds.”

Pennywise glanced up at the sky. “We are meant for a higher purpose, you and I. The distractions of the world are just that, distractions. If we allow ourselves to be turned aside from our course

by them, we are duly punished.”

“And our punishment is visited on everyone we care about? That seems a little hard on *them*.”

"Fate is never fair. You are caught in a current much stronger than you are, Jonathan; struggle against it and you'll drown not just yourself but those who try to save you. Swim with it, and you'll survive."

"Eddie—"

"No harm will come to your brother if you join with me. I will go to the ends of the earth to protect him. I will bring him to Derry, where nothing can happen to him. I promise you that."

"Bill. Richie. Georgie—"

"The Denbrough children, also, will have my protection."

Ben said softly, "Beverly—"

Pennywise hesitated, then said, "All your friends will be protected. Why can't you believe me, Ben? This is the only way that you can save them. I swear it."

Ben couldn't speak. He shut his eyes again. Inside him the cold of fall battled with the memory of summer.

"Have you made your decision?" Pennywise said; Ben couldn't see him, but he could hear the finality in the question. He even sounded eager.

Ben opened his eyes. The starlight was a white burst against his irises; for a moment he could see nothing else. He said, "Yes, Father. I've made my decision."

18. Fearless

When Eddie awoke, light was streaming in through the windows and there was a sharp pain in his left cheek. Rolling over, he saw that he'd fallen asleep on his sketchpad and the corner of it had been digging into his face. He'd also dropped his pen onto the duvet, and there was a black stain spreading across the cloth. With a groan he sat up, rubbed his cheek ruefully, and went in search of a shower.

The bathroom showed telltale signs of the activities of the night before; there were bloody cloths shoved into the trash and a smear of dried blood across the sink. With a shudder, Eddie ducked into the shower with a bottle of grapefruit body wash, determined to scrub away his lingering feelings of unease.

Afterward, wrapped in one of Jim's robes and with a towel around his damp hair, he pushed the bathroom door open to discover Eleven lurking on the other side, clutching a towel in one hand and her glittery hair in the other. She must have slept on it, he thought, because one side of the glittered spikes looked dented in. "Jesus, you take longer in the shower than a girl." She said. I'm not getting any younger waiting out here."

Eddie stepped aside to let her pass. "How old *are* you, anyway?" he asked curiously.

Eleven winked at him. "I was alive when the Dead Sea was just a lake that was feeling a little poorly."

Eddie rolled his eyes.

Eleven made a shooping motion. "Now move your petite behind. I need to get in there; my hair is a *wreck* ."

"Don't use up all the body wash, it's expensive," Eddie told her, and headed into the kitchen, where he rooted around for some filters and plugged in the Mr. Coffee machine. The familiar burble of the percolator and the smell of coffee damped down his feeling of unease. As long as there was coffee in the world, how bad could things be?

Eddie headed back to the bedroom to get dressed. Ten minutes later, in jeans and a blue-and-green striped sweater, he was in the living room shaking Jim awake. He sat up with a groan, his hair rumpled and his face creased with sleep. "How are you feeling?" Eddie asked, handing him a chipped mug full of steaming coffee.

"Better now." Jim glanced down at the torn fabric of his shirt; the edges of the tear were stained with blood. "Where's Mike?"

"He's asleep in your room, remember? You said he could have it." Eddie perched on the arm of the sofa.

Jim rubbed at his shadowed eyes. "I don't remember last night all that well," he admitted. "I remember going out to the truck and not much after that."

"There were more demons hiding outside. They attacked you. Richie and I took care of them."

"More Drevak demons?"

"No." Eddie spoke with reluctance. "Richie called them Raum demons."

"Raum demons?" Jim sat up straight. "That's serious stuff. Drevak demons are dangerous pests, but the Raum—"

"You got rid of them? Or Richie did? Eddie, I don't want you—"

"It wasn't like that." Eddie shook his head. "It was like..."

"Wasn't Eleven around? Why didn't she go with you?" Jim interrupted, clearly upset.

"I was healing Mike, that's why," Eleven said, coming into the living room smelling strongly of grapefruit. Her hair was wrapped in a towel and she was dressed in a red robe with silver stripes down the side. "Where is the gratitude?"

"I *am* grateful." Jim looked as if he were both angry and trying not to laugh at the same time. "It's just that if anything had happened to Eddie—"

"You would have died if I'd gone out there with them," Eleven said, flopping down into a chair. "He and Richie handled the demons just fine on their own, didn't you?" She turned to Eddie.

He squirmed. "You see, that's just it—"

"What's just it?" It was Mike, still in the clothes he'd worn the night before, with one of Jim's big flannel shirts thrown over his T-shirt. He moved stiffly across the room and sat down gingerly in a chair. "Is that coffee I smell?" he asked hopefully, wrinkling his nose.

Eddie rose to his feet. "You want me to get you some?"

"Sure." Mike nodded. "Milk and sugar!" he called as Eddie left the room, but by the time he was back from the kitchen, steaming mug in hand, the werewolf boy was frowning. "I don't really remember what happened last night," he said, "but there's something about Stan, something that's bothering me..."

"Well, you did try to kill him," Eddie said, settling back onto the arm of the sofa. "Maybe that's it."

Mike paled, staring down into his coffee. "I'd forgotten. He's a vampire now." He looked up at Eddie. "I didn't mean to hurt him. I was just..."

"Yes?" Eddie raised his eyebrows. "Just what?"

Mike's face went a slow, dark red. He set his coffee down on the table beside him.

"You might want to lie down," Eleven advised. "I find that helps when the crushing sense of horrible realization sets in."

The front door banged open and Richie and Ben came in, followed by Bill, who was carrying a white box. Eleven hastily pulled the towel off her head and dropped it behind the armchair. Without the gel and glitter, her hair was dark and straight, halfway to her shoulders.

Eddie's eyes went immediately to Richie, as they always did; he couldn't help it, but at least no one else seemed to notice. Richie looked strung up, wired and tense, but also exhausted, his eyes

ringed with gray. His eyes slid over Eddie without expression and landed on Mike, who was weeping soundlessly and didn't seem to have heard them come in. "Everyone in a good mood, I see," he observed. "Keeping up morale?"

Mike rubbed at his eyes. "Crap," he muttered. "I hate crying in front of Shadowhunters."

"So go cry in another room," Richie said, his voice devoid of warmth. "We certainly don't need you sniveling in here while we're talking, do we?"

"Richie," Eddie began warningly, but Mike had already gotten to his feet and stalked out of the room through the kitchen door.

Bill turned on Richie. "Talking? W-we weren't talking."

"We will be," Ben said, flopping down onto the piano bench and stretching out his long legs. "Eleven wants to shout at me, don't you, Eleven?"

"Yes," Eleven said, tearing her eyes away from the wall long enough to scowl. "Where the hell were you? I thought I was clear with you that you were to stay in the house."

"I thought he didn't have a choice," Eddie said. "I thought he had to stay where you are. You know, because of magic."

"Normally, yes," Eleven said crossly, "but last night, after everything I did, my magic was—depleted."

"Depleted?"

"Yes." Eleven looked angrier than ever. "Even the High Witch of Brooklyn doesn't have inexhaustible resources. I'm only human. Well," she amended, "half-human, anyway."

"But you must have known your resources were depleted," Jim said, not unkindly, "didn't you?"

"Yes, and I made the little bastard swear to stay in the house." Eleven glared at Ben. "Now I know what your much-vaunted Shadowhunter

vows are worth.”

“You need to know how to make me swear properly,” Ben said, unfazed. “Only an oath on the Angel has any meaning.”

“It’s t-true.” Bill said.

Richie picked up Mike’s untouched mug of coffee and took a sip. He made a face. “Sugar.”

“W-where were you all night, anyway?” Bill asked Ben.

“I couldn’t sleep, so I went for a walk,” Ben said. “Beverly kept me company for a while.”

His face stiffened when he said her name, as if he was remembering something he’d rather forget.

Eleven stared at Richie. “What about you? Where were you all night?”

Richie shrugged. “I went to the Institute. When I got back, I bumped into this sad bastard mooning around the porch.” He pointed at Bill.

“Were you there all night?” Ben asked Bill.

“No,” Bill said. “I w-went home and then came back. I’m wearing d-different clothes, aren’t I? Look.”

Everyone looked. Bill was wearing a dark sweater and jeans, which was exactly what he’d been wearing the day before. Eddie decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. “What’s in the box?” he asked.

“Oh. Ah.” Bill looked at the box as if he’d forgotten it. “D-doughnuts, actually.” He opened the box and set it down on the coffee table. “Does anyone w-want one?”

Everyone, as it turned out, wanted a doughnut. Richie wanted two. After downing the Boston cream that Eddie brought him, Jim seemed moderately revitalized; he kicked the blanket the rest of the way off and sat up against the back of the couch. “There’s one thing I don’t get,” he said.

“Just one thing? You’re way ahead of the rest of us,” said Richie.

“The two of you went out after me when I didn’t come back to the house,” Jim said, looking from Eddie to Richie.

“Three of us,” Eddie said. “Stan came with.”

Jim looked pained. “Fine. The three of you. There were two demons, but Eddie says you killed neither of them. So what happened?”

“I would have killed mine, but it ran off,” Richie said. “Otherwise—”

“But w-why would it do that?” Bill inquired. “Two of them, three of you—m-maybe it felt outnumbered?”

“No offense to anyone involved, but the only one among you who seems formidable is Richie,” Eleven said. “An untrained Shadowhunter and a scared vampire...”

“I think it might have been me,” Eddie said. “I think maybe I scared it off.”

Eleven blinked. “Didn’t I just say—”

“I don’t mean I scared it off because I’m so terrifying,” Eddie said. “I think it was this.” He raised his hand, turning it so that they could see the Mark on his inner arm.

There was a sudden quiet. Ben looked at him steadily, then away; Bill blinked, and Jim looked astounded. “I’ve never seen that Mark before,” he said finally. “Has anyone else?”

“No,” Eleven said. “But I don’t like it.”

“I’m not sure what it is, or what it means,” Eddie said, lowering his arm. “But it doesn’t come from the Gray Book.”

“All runes come from the Gray Book.” Richie’s voice was firm.

“Not this one,” Eddie said. “I saw it in a dream.”

“In a *dream* ?” Ben scoffed. “What are you talking about?”

"Don't you remember when we were in the Seelie Court...and the Seelie Queen told us we were *experiments*? That Pennywise had done—had done *things* to us, to make us different, special? She told me that mine was the gift of words that cannot be spoken, and yours was the Angel's own gift?"

"That was faerie nonsense."

"Faeries don't lie, Ben. Words that cannot be spoken—she meant runes. Each has a different meaning, but they're meant to be drawn, not said aloud." He went on, ignoring his doubtful look. "Remember when you asked me how I'd gotten into your cell in the Silent City? I told you I just used a regular Opening rune—"

"Was that all you did?" Bill looked surprised. "I g-got there just after you did and it looked like s-someone had ripped that door off its hinges."

"And my rune didn't just unlock the door," Eddie said. "It unlocked everything inside the cell, too. It broke Ben's manacles open." He took a breath. "I think the Queen meant I can draw runes that are more powerful than ordinary runes. And maybe even create new ones."

Richie shook his head. "No one can create new runes—"

"M-maybe he can, Richie." Bill sounded thoughtful. "It's true, n-none of us have ever seen that Mark on his arm b-before."

"Bill's right," Jim said. "Eddie, why don't you go and get your sketchbook?"

Eddie looked at him in some surprise. His gray-blue eyes were tired, a little sunken, but held the same steadiness they'd held when he was six years old and Jim took him to Coney Park every weekend.

"Okay," he said. "I'll be right back."

To get to the spare bedroom, Eddie had to cross through the kitchen, where he found Mike seated on a stool pulled up to the counter, looking miserable.

"Eddie," he said, jumping down from the stool. "Can I talk to you for a second?"

"I'm just going to my room to get something—"

"Look, I'm sorry about what happened with Stan. I was delirious."

"Oh, yeah? What happened to all that werewolves are destined to hate vampires business?"

Mike blew out an exasperated breath. "We are, but—I guess I don't have to hurry the process along."

"Don't explain it to me; explain it to Stan."

"I doubt he'll want to talk to me."

"He might. He's pretty forgiving."

Mike looked at him more closely. "I don't want to sound like a weird stalker, but has Beverly ever—"

Eddie sighed. "Do you have a thing for her or something?"

Mike flushed again, his cheeks turning dark red. "Can you blame me? Pretty girl meets outsider guy, I thought I had a chance but I don't think I'm her type."

"I don't even know what Beverly's type is."

"All right, I got it," Eddie said, coming back into the living room with his sketchpad in one hand and a box of Prismacolor pencils in the other. He pulled a chair out from the little-used dining room table—Jim always ate in the kitchen or in his office, and the table was covered in paper and old bills—and sat down, sketchpad in front of him. He felt as if he were taking a test at art school. *Draw this apple.* "What do you want me to do?"

"What do you think?" Richie was still sitting on the piano bench, his shoulders slumped forward; he looked as if he hadn't slept all night.

Ben was leaning against the piano behind him.

“Richie, that’s enough.” Jim was sitting up straight but looked as if it were something of an effort. “You said you could draw new runes, Eddie?”

“I said I thought so.”

“Well, I’d like you to try.”

“Now?”

Jim smiled faintly. “Unless you’ve got something else in mind?”

Eddie flipped the sketchpad to a blank page and stared down at it. Never had a sheet of paper looked quite so empty to him before. He could sense the stillness in the room, everyone watching her: Eleven with her ancient, tempered curiosity; Ben too preoccupied with his own problems to care much for his; Jim hopefully; and Richie with a cold, frightening blankness. Eddie remembered him saying that he wished he could hate him and wondered if someday he might succeed.

Eddie threw the pencil down. “I can’t just do it on command like that. Not without an idea.”

“What kind of idea?” said Jim.

“I mean, I don’t even know what runes already exist. I need to know a meaning, a word, before I can draw a rune for it.”

“It’s hard enough for us to remember every rune—” Richie began, but Ben, to Eddie’s surprise, cut him off. “How about,” he said quietly, “Fearless?”

“Fearless?” Eddie echoed.

“There are runes for bravery,” said Ben. “But never anything to take away fear. But if you, as you say, can create new runes...” He glanced around, and saw Bill’s and Jim’s surprised expressions. “Look, I just remembered that there isn’t one, that’s all. And it seems harmless enough.”

Eddie looked over at Jim, who shrugged. “Fine,” he said.

Eddie took a dark gray pencil from the box and set the tip of it to the paper. He thought of shapes, lines, curlicues; he thought of the signs in the Gray Book, ancient and perfect, embodiments of a language too faultless for speech. A soft voice spoke inside his head: *Who are you, to think you can speak the language of heaven?*

The pencil moved. He was almost sure he hadn’t moved it, but it slid across the paper, describing a single line. He felt his heart skip. He thought of his mother, sitting dreamily before her canvas, creating her own vision of the world in ink and oil paint. He thought, *Who am I? I am Sonia Kaspbrak’s son.* The pencil moved again, and this time his breath caught; he found he was whispering the word, under his breath: “Fearless. Fearless.” The pencil looped back up, and now he was guiding it rather than being guided by it. When he was done, he set the pencil down and gazed for a moment, wonderingly, at the result.

The completed Fearless rune was a matrix of strongly swirling lines: a rune as bold and aerodynamic as an eagle. He tore the page free and held it up so the others could see it. “There,” he said, and was rewarded by the startled look on Jim’s face—so he hadn’t believed him—and the fractional widening of Richie’s eyes.

“Cool,” Bill said.

Richie got to his feet and crossed the room, taking the sheet of paper out of Eddie’s hand. “But does it work?”

Eddie wondered if he meant the question or if he was just being nasty. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, how do we know it works? Right now it’s just a drawing—you can’t take fear away from a piece of paper, it doesn’t have any to begin with. We have to try it out on one of us before we can be sure it’s a real rune.”

“I’m not sure that’s such a great idea,” Jim said.

“It’s a fabulous idea.” Richie dropped the paper back onto the table,

and began to slide off his jacket. "I've got a stele we can use. Who wants to do me?"

"A regrettable choice of words," muttered Eleven.

Jim stood up. "No," he said. "Richie, you already behave as if you've never heard the word 'fear.' I fail to see how we're going to be able to tell the difference if it does work on you."

Bill stifled what sounded like a laugh. Richie simply smiled a tight, unfriendly smile. "I've heard the word 'fear,'" he said. "I simply choose to believe it doesn't apply to me."

"Exactly the problem," said Jim.

"Well, why don't I try it on you, then?" Eddie said, but Jim shook his head.

"You can't Mark Downworlders, Eddie, not with any real effect. The demon disease that causes lycanthropy prevents the Marks from taking effect."

"Then..."

"T-try it on me," Bill said unexpectedly. "I could do with some fearlessness." He slid his jacket off, tossed it over the piano stool, and crossed the room to stand in front of Richie. "Here. M-mark my arm."

Richie glanced over at Eddie. "Unless you think you should do it?"

He shook his head. "No. You're probably better at actually applying Marks than I am."

Richie shrugged. "Roll up your sleeve, Bill."

Obediently, Bill rolled his sleeve up. There was already a permanent Mark on his upper arm, an elegant scroll of lines meant to give him perfect balance. They all leaned forward, even Eleven, as Richie carefully traced the outlines of the Fearless rune on Bill's arm, just below the existing Mark. Bill winced as the stele traced its burning path across his skin. When Richie was done, he slid his stele back into his pocket and stood a moment admiring his handiwork.

“Well, it *looks* nice at least,” he announced. “Whether it works or not...”

Bill touched the new Mark with his fingertips, then glanced up to find everyone else in the room staring at him.

“So?” Eddie said.

“So what?” Bill rolled his sleeve down, covering the Mark.

“So, how do you *feel*? Any different?”

Bill looked considering. “Not really.”

Richie threw his hands up. “So it doesn’t work.”

“Not necessarily,” Jim said. “There might simply be nothing going on that might activate it. Perhaps there isn’t anything here that Bill is afraid of.”

Ben glanced at Bill and raised his eyebrows. “Boo,” he said.

Richie was grinning. “Come on, surely you’ve got a phobia or two. What scares you?”

Bill thought for a moment. “S-spiders,” he said.

Eddie turned to Jim. “Have you got a spider anywhere?”

Jim looked exasperated. “Why would I have a *spider* ? Do I look like someone who would collect them?”

“No offense,” Ben said, “but you kind of do.”

“You know”—Bill’s tone was sour—“m-maybe this was a stupid experiment.”

“What about the dark?” Eddie suggested. “We could lock you in the basement.”

“I’m a d-demon hunter,” Bill said, with exaggerated patience. “Clearly, *I am not afraid of the d-dark.*”

"Well, you might be."

"But I'm not." Eddie was spared replying by the buzz of the doorbell. He looked over at Jim, raising his eyebrows. "Stan?"

"Couldn't be. It's daylight."

"Oh, right." He'd forgotten again. "It's Beverly. Do you want me to go get it?"

"No." He stood up with only a short grunt of pain. "I'm fine. I still can open doors."

He crossed the room and threw the door open. His shoulders went stiff with surprise; Eddie heard the bark of a familiar, stridently angry female and a moment later Beverly strode past Jim. "I found them at the door." She said, then pointed to the people behind her. She looked at the others on the table. "You ate those doughnuts without me?"

No one bothered to answer. Behind Beverly, Sharon Denbrough strode into the room, followed by the gray, menacing figure of the Inquisitor. Behind them was a tall and burly man, dark-haired and olive-skinned, with a thick black beard. Though it had been taken many years ago, Eddie recognized him from the old photo Keene had showed him: This was Zack Denbrough.

Ben's head went up with a snap. Richie paled markedly, but showed no other emotion. And Bill—Bill stared from his mother, to his father. His clear, light blue eyes darkened with a hard resolution. He took a step forward, placing himself between his parents and everyone else in the room.

Sharon, on seeing her eldest son in the middle of Jim's living room, did a double take. "Bill, what on *earth* are you doing here? I thought I made it clear that—"

"Mother." Bill's voice as he interrupted his mother was firm, implacable, and not unkind. "Father. T-there's something I have to tell you." He inhaled. "R-remember two months ago when you asked if I'd ever m-marry a girl?"

Zack Denbrough looked at his son with some exasperation. "Bill," he said. "This is hardly the time."

"Yes, it is. This is i-important. You see, I'm n-not going to marry any girl." Words seemed to be pouring out of Bill in a torrent, while his parents looked on in confusion. Ben and Eddie were staring at him with expressions of nearly identical astonishment. "I c-can't keep this a secret anymore. I need to be honest about who I am. I'm g—"

Eleven's fingers moved, quick as a flash of light, in Bill's direction. There was a faint shimmer in the air around Bill—his eyes rolled up—and he dropped to the floor, felled like a tree.

"Bill!" Sharon clapped her hand to her mouth. But Bill had already begun to stir, his eyelids fluttering open.

"Wha—what—why am I on the floor?"

"That's a good question." Beverly glowered down at him. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Bill sat up, holding his head. A look of alarm crossed his face. "Wait—did I say anything? B-before I passed out, I mean."

Richie snorted. "You know how we were wondering if that thing Eddie did would work or not?" he asked. "It works all right."

Bikk looked supremely horrified. "What did I say?"

"You said you weren't gonna marry a girl, and that you needed to be honest with yourself," his father told him. "Though you weren't clear as to why that was important."

"It's not," Bill said. "I just..."

Ben sighed. "Bill's been delirious," he said. "Side effect of some demon toxins. He'll be fine."

"Demon toxins?" Sharon's voice had become shrill. "No one reported a demon attack to the Institute. What is going on here, Jimothy? This is your house, isn't it? You know perfectly well if there's been a

demon attack you're supposed to report it—"

"Jim was attacked too," Eddie said. "He's been unconscious."

"How convenient. Everyone's either unconscious or apparently delirious," said the Inquisitor. Her knifelike voice cut through the room, silencing everyone. "Downworlder, you know perfectly well that Jonathan Gray should not be in your house. He should have been locked up in the warlock's care."

"I have a name, you know," Eleven said. "Not," she added, seeming to think twice about interrupting the Inquisitor, "that that matters, really. In fact, forget all about it."

"I know your name, Jane Ives," said the Inquisitor. "You've failed in your duty once; you won't get another chance."

"Failed in my duty?" Eleven frowned. "Just by bringing the boy here? There was nothing in the contract I signed that said I couldn't bring him with me at my own discretion."

"That wasn't your failure," the Inquisitor said. "Letting him see his father last night, *that* was your failure."

There was a stunned silence. Bill scrambled up off the floor, his eyes seeking out Ben's—but Ben wouldn't look at him. His face was a mask.

"And that's my cue to leave," Beverly said, before locking herself up in the guest room.

"That's ridiculous," Jim said. Eddie had rarely seen him look so angry. "Ben doesn't even know where Pennywise is. Stop hounding him."

"Hounding is what I do, Downworlder," said the Inquisitor. "It's my job." She turned to Ben. "Tell the truth, now, boy," she said, "and it will all be much easier. Tell us where you really were last night. Tell us about Pennywise's little pleasure boat."

Eddie stared at him. *I went for a walk*, he'd said. But that didn't mean anything. Maybe he really had gone for a walk. But his heart, his

stomach, felt sick.

When Ben didn't speak, Zack Denbrough said, in his deep bass voice: "Joyce? You're saying Pennywise is—was—"

"On a boat in the middle of the East River," said the Inquisitor. "That's correct."

"That's why I couldn't find him," Eleven said, half to herself. "All that water—it disrupted my spell."

"What's Pennywise doing in the middle of the river?" Jim said, bewildered.

"Ask Jonathan," said the Inquisitor. "He borrowed a motorcycle from the head of the city's vampire clan and he flew it to the boat. Isn't that right, Jonathan?"

Ben said nothing. His face was unreadable. The Inquisitor, though, looked hungry, as if she were feeding off the suspense in the room.

"Reach into the pocket of your jacket," she said. "Take out the object you've been carrying with you since you last left the Institute."

Slowly, Ben did as she asked. As he drew his hand out of his pocket, Eddie recognized the shimmering blue-gray object he held. The piece of the Portal mirror.

"Give it to me." The Inquisitor snatched it out of his hand. He winced; the edge of the glass had cut him, and blood welled up along his palm. Sharon made a soft noise, but didn't move. "I knew you'd return to the Institute for this," said the Inquisitor, positively gloating now. "I knew your sentimentality wouldn't allow you to leave it behind."

"What is it?" Zack Denbrough sounded bewildered.

"A bit of a Portal in mirror form," said the Inquisitor. "When the Portal was destroyed, the image of its last destination was preserved." She turned the bit of glass over in her long, spidery fingers. "In this case, the Hanscom country house."

Ben's eyes followed the movement of the mirror. In the bit of it Eddie could see, there seemed to be a trapped piece of blue sky. He wondered if it ever rained in Derry.

With a sudden, violent motion at odds with her calm tone, the Inquisitor dashed the piece of mirror to the ground. It shattered instantly into powdery shards. Eddie heard Ben suck his breath in, but he didn't move.

The Inquisitor drew on a pair of gray gloves and knelt among the bits of mirror, sifting them through her fingers until she found what she was looking for—a single sheet of thin paper. She stood, holding it up for everyone in the room to see the thick rune written on it in black ink. "I marked this paper with a tracking rune and slipped it between the bit of mirror and its backing. Then I replaced it in the boy's room. Don't feel bad for not noticing it," she said to Ben. "Older heads and wiser than yours have been fooled by the Clave."

"You've been spying on me," Ben said, and now his voice was colored with anger. "Is that what the Clave does, invade the privacy of its fellow Shadowhunters to—"

"Be careful what you say to me. You are not the only one who's broken the Law." The Inquisitor's chilly gaze slid around the room. "In releasing you from the Silent City, in freeing you from the warlock's control, your friends have done the same."

"Ben isn't our friend," said Richie. "He's our brother."

"I'd be careful what you say, Richard Tozier" said the Inquisitor. "You could be considered complicit and get your Marks stripped."

"Complicit?" To everyone's surprise, it was Zack who had spoken. "The boy was just trying to keep you from shattering our family. For God's sake, Joyce, these are all just children—"

"Children?" The Inquisitor turned her icicle gaze on Zack. "Just as you were children when the Circle plotted the destruction of the Clave? Just as my son was a child when he—" She caught herself with a sort of gasp, as if gaining control of herself by main force.

"So this is about Will after all," said Jim, with a sort of pity in his voice. "Joyce—"

The Inquisitor's face contorted. "This is not about Will! This is about the *Law*!"

Sharon's thin fingers twisted as her hands worked at each other. "And Ben," she said. "What's going to happen to him?"

"He will return to Derry with me tomorrow," said the Inquisitor. "You've forfeited your right to know any more than that."

"How can you take him back to that place?" Eddie demanded. "When will he come back?"

"Eddie, don't," Ben said. The words were a plea, but Eddie battled on.

"Ben isn't the problem here! Pennywise is the problem!"

"Leave it alone, Eddie!" Ben yelled. "For your own good, leave it alone!"

Before Eddie could say anything else, Jim's hand descended onto his shoulder. He spoke, sounding as grave as he had the night he'd told Eddie the story of his life. "If the boy went to his father," he said, "knowing the kind of father Pennywise was, it is because we failed him, not because he has failed us."

"Save your sophistry, Jimothy," said the Inquisitor. "You've gone as soft as a mundane."

"She's right." Bill was sitting on the edge of the sofa, his arms crossed and his jaw set. "Ben lied to us. There's no excuse for that."

Ben's jaw dropped. He'd been sure of Bill's loyalty, at least, and Eddie didn't blame him. Even Richie was staring at his brother in horror. "Bill, how can you say that?"

"The Law is the Law, Richie," Bill shrugged.

The Inquisitor turned to Ben. "Give me your hands."

Ben held his hands out as the Inquisitor produced a stele from some hidden pocket and proceeded to trace a Mark around the circumference of his wrists. When she took her hands away, Ben's wrists were crossed, one over the other, bound together with what looked like a circlet of burning flames.

Eddie cried out. "What are you doing? You'll hurt him—"

"I'm fine, little brother." Ben spoke calmly enough. "The flames won't burn me unless I try to get my hands free."

"And as for you," the Inquisitor added, and turned on Eddie, much to Eddie's surprise. Up until now the Inquisitor had barely seemed to notice he was alive. "You were lucky enough to be raised by Sonia and escape your father's taint. Nevertheless, I'll be keeping an eye on you."

Jim's grip tightened on Eddie's shoulder. "Is that a threat?"

"The Clave does not make threats, Jimothy Hopper. The Clave makes promises and keeps them." The Inquisitor sounded almost cheerful. She was the only one in the room who could be described that way; everyone else looked shell-shocked, except for Ben. His teeth were bared in a snarl Eddie doubted he was even aware of. He looked like a lion in a trap.

"Come, Jonathan," the Inquisitor said. "Walk in front of me. If you make a single move to flee, I'll put a blade between your shoulders."

Ben had to struggle to turn the front doorknob with his bound hands. Eddie set his teeth to keep from screaming, and then the door was open and Ben was gone and so was the Inquisitor. The Denbroughs followed in a line, Bill still staring at the ground. The door shut behind them and Eddie and Jim were alone in the living room, silent in shared disbelief.

19. The Downward Spiral

“Jim,” Eddie began, the moment door had shut behind the Denbroughs. “What are we going to do—”

Jim had his hands pressed to either side of his head as if he were keeping it from splitting in half. “Coffee,” he declared. “I need coffee.”

“I brought you coffee.”

Jim dropped his hands and sighed. “I need more.”

Eddie followed him into the kitchen, where he helped himself to yet more coffee before sitting down at the kitchen table and running his hands distractedly through his hair. “This is bad,” Jim said. “Very bad.”

“You think?” Eddie couldn’t imagine drinking coffee right now. His nerves already felt like they were stretched out as thin as wires. “What happens if they take him to Derry?”

“Trial before the Clave. They’ll probably find him guilty. Then punishment. He’s young, so they might just strip his Marks, not curse him.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means they’ll take his Marks away, unmake him as a Shadowhunter, and throw him out of the Clave. He’ll be a mundane.”

“But that would kill him. It really would. He’d rather die.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Jim had finished his coffee and stared morosely at the mug before setting it back down. “But that won’t make any difference to the Clave. They can’t get their hands on Pennywise, so they’ll punish his son instead.”

“What about me? I’m his son too.”

“But you’re not of their world. Ben is. Not that I don’t suggest you lie

low for a while yourself. I wish we could head up to the farmhouse —”

“We can’t just leave Ben with them!” Eddie was appalled. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Of course you aren’t.” Jim waved away his protest. “I said I wish we could, not that I thought we should. There’s the question of what Joyce will do now that she knows where Pennywise is, of course. We could find ourselves in the middle of a war.”

“I don’t care if she wants to kill Pennywise. I just want to get Ben back.”

“That may not be so easy,” said Jik, “considering that in this case, he actually did what he’s accused of doing.”

Eddie was outraged. “What, you think he killed the Silent Brothers? You think—”

“No. I don’t think he killed the Silent Brothers. I think he did exactly what Joyce saw him do: He went to see his father.”

Very faintly, Mike could hear the sound of voices coming from the kitchen. They were done with all their shouting in the living room. Time to get out. He folded up the note he’d scribbled hastily, left on Jim’s bed, and crossed the room to the window he’d spent the past twenty minutes forcing open. Cool air spilled through it—it was one of those early fall days when the sky seemed impossibly blue and distant and the air was faintly tinged with the smell of smoke.

“Where are you going?” A voice came behind him. He turned around quickly, the floral scent of Beverly filling his nostrils. She was staring at him oddly, as if he was a circus attraction.

“Wherever,” Mike said. “I overused my welcome.”

“Come on now,” Beverly grabbed the note from Jim’s bed, scanning it with her eyes. *“I’m sorry I left. Gone to make amends. Thank you for everything?”*

Mike scoffed. "I'm not good at this stuff, don't blame me."

"I'm not. Can I come with you?" Beverly said. Mike didn't know if she was joking.

"Why?"

Beverly shrugged. "Why not?" She dropped the note on Jim's bed. "I don't think Eddie remembers I'm here. I need to get out too."

"Did you hear what they were saying? It was all intense."

"Yeah, I was in the next room. But it's not any of my business."

Mike sighed, picking up invisible dirt off his shirt. "I don't know if Eddie told you, but Stan and I—"

"I know what happened." Beverly nodded slowly. "I don't blame you."

"You don't?"

Beverly sighed. "One thing I learned from all of this is that is better making friends than enemies. Especially if they could eat you in a full moon." She laughed.

Mike did too. "Well, I promise you I won't do it again. At least, I'll try not to."

Beverly nodded. "I'll cover for you. You can go."

"I thought you wanted to come."

"I know that look on your face, you want to be alone right now." Beverly said in a low voice. "But, if you ever want to talk, I'm all ears. I don't have many friends." She looked down.

"Me neither." Mike went to the window again. "I'll see you later?"

She wiggled her fingers. "Take care, Wolfie." Then she disappeared before Mike could blink.

Mike scooted onto the windowsill and looked down. It would have been a worrying jump for him before he'd been Changed; now he

spared only a moment's thought for his injured shoulder before leaping. He landed in a crouch on the cracked concrete of Jim's backyard. Straightening up, he glanced back at the house, but no one threw a door open or called out to him to come back.

He fought down an errant stab of disappointment. It wasn't as if they'd paid that much attention to him when he *was* in the house, he thought, scrambling up the high chain-link fence that separated Jim's backyard from the alley, so why would they notice that he'd left it? He was clearly an afterthought, just as he'd always been.

He crossed the street to avoid passing right in front of Jim's house. The street was nearly deserted, Brooklynners sleeping their late Sunday-morning sleep. He headed toward the Bedford Avenue subway, his mind still on Beverly. There was a hollow place in the pit of his stomach that ached when he thought of her.

Someone laughed. The sound echoed off the high factory walls on his left. His heart contracting with sudden fear, Mike whirled around, but the street behind him was empty. There was an old woman walking her dogs along the riverside, but Mike doubted she was within shouting distance.

He sped up his pace anyway. He could outwalk most humans, he reminded himself, not to mention outrun them. Even in his present state, with his arm aching like someone had slammed a sledgehammer into his shoulder, it wasn't as if he had anything to fear from a mugger or rapist. Two teenage boys armed with knives had tried to grab him while he was walking through Central Park one night after he'd first come to the city, and only Lucas had kept him from killing them both.

So why was he so panicked?

He glanced behind him. The old woman was gone; Kent was empty. The old abandoned Domino sugar factory rose up in front of him. Seized by a sudden urge to get off the street, he ducked down the alley beside it.

He found himself in a narrow space between two buildings, full of garbage, discarded bottles, the skittering of rats. The roofs above him

touched, blocking out the sun and making him feel as if he had ducked into a tunnel. The walls were brick, set with small, dirty windows, many of which had been smashed in by vandals. Through them he could see the abandoned factory floor and row after row of metal boilers, furnaces, and vats. The air smelled of burned sugar. He leaned against one of the walls, trying to still the pounding of his heart. He had almost succeeded in calming himself down when an impossibly familiar voice spoke to him out of the shadows:

“Mike?”

Mike whirled around. *He* was standing at the entrance to the alley, his hair lit from behind, shining like a halo around his beautiful face. Dark eyes fringed with long lashes regarded her curiously. He was wearing jeans and, despite the chill in the air, a short-sleeved T-shirt. He still looked fifteen.

“*Andy*,” Mike whispered.

Andy moved toward him, his steps making no sound. “It’s been a long time, little brother.”

Mike wanted to run, but his legs felt like bags of water. He pressed himself back against the wall as if he could disappear into it. “But—you’re *dead*.”

“And you didn’t cry at my funeral, did you, Mike? No tears for your big brother?”

“You were a monster,” he whispered. “You tried to kill me—”

“Not hard enough.” There was something long and sharp in his hand now, something that gleamed like silver fire in the dimness. Mike wasn’t sure what it was; his vision was blurred by terror. He slid to the ground as Andy moved toward him, his legs no longer able to hold him up.

Andy knelt down beside him. Mike could see what it was in his hand now: a snapped-off jagged edge of glass from one of the broken windows. Terror rose and broke over him like a wave, but it wasn’t fear of the weapon in his brother’s hand that was crushing him, it

was the emptiness in his eyes. Mike could look into them and through them and see only darkness. “Do you remember,” Andy said, “when I told you I’d cut out your tongue before I’d let you tattle on me to Mom and Dad?”

Paralyzed with fear, Mike could only stare at him. Already he could feel the glass cutting into his skin, the choking taste of blood filling his mouth, and he wished he were dead, already dead, anything was better than this horror and this dread—

“Enough, Agramon.” A man’s voice cut through the fog in his head. Not Andy’s voice—it was soft, cultured, undeniably human. It reminded Mike of someone—but who?

“As you wish, Lord Pennywise.” Andy breathed outward, a soft sigh of disappointment—and then his face began to fade and crumble. In a moment he was gone, and with him the sense of paralyzing, bone-crushing terror that had threatened to choke the life out of Mike. He sucked in a desperate breath.

“Good. He’s breathing.” The man’s voice again, irritable now. “Really, Agramon. A few more seconds and he’d have been dead.”

Mike looked up. The man—Pennywise—was standing over him, very tall, dressed all in black, even the gloves on his hands and the thick-soled boots on his feet. He used the tip of a boot now to force Mike’s chin up. His voice when he spoke was cool, perfunctory. “How old are you?”

The face gazing down at him was narrow, sharp-boned, leached of all color, his eyes black and his hair so white he looked like a photograph in negative. On the left side of his throat, just above the collar of his coat, was a spiraling Mark.

“You’re Pennywise?” Mike whispered. “But I thought that you—”

The boot came down on his hand, sending a stab of pain shooting up his arm. He shouted in pain.

“I asked you a question,” he said. “How old are you?”

“How old am I?” The pain in Mike’s hand, mixed with the acrid

stench of garbage all around made his stomach turn. “Screw you.”

A bar of light seemed to leap between Pennywise's fingers; he slashed it down and across Mike's face so quickly that he didn't have time to jerk back. A hot line of pain burned its way across his cheek; he slapped a hand to his face and felt blood slick his fingers.

“Now,” Pennywise said, in the same precise and cultured voice. “How old are you?”

“Fifteen. I'm fifteen.”

Mike sensed, rather than saw, him smile. “*Perfect.*”

Once back at the Institute, the Inquisitor herded Ben away from the Denbroughs and up the stairs to the training room. Catching sight of himself in the long mirrors that ran along the walls, he stiffened in shock. He hadn't really looked at himself in days, and last night had been a bad one. His eyes were surrounded by black shadows, his shirt smeared with dried blood and filthy mud from the East River. His face looked hollow and drawn.

“Admiring yourself?” The Inquisitor's voice cut through his reverie. “You won't look so pretty when the Clave gets through with you.”

“You do seem obsessed with my looks.” Ben turned away from the mirror with some relief. “Could it be that all this is because you're attracted to me?”

“Don't be revolting.” The Inquisitor had taken four long strips of metal from the gray pouch that hung at her waist. Angel blades. “You could be my son.”

“Will.” Ben remembered what Jim had said back at the house. “That's what he's called, right?”

The Inquisitor whirled on him. The blades she gripped were vibrating with her rage. “*Don't you ever say his name.*”

For a moment Ben wondered if she might really try to kill him. He

said nothing as she got herself under control. Without looking at him, she pointed with one of the blades. “Stand there in the center of the room, please.”

Ben obeyed. Though he tried not to look at the mirrors, he could see his reflection—and the Inquisitor’s—out of the corner of his eye, the mirrors reflecting back at each other until an infinite number of Inquisitors stood there, threatening an infinite number of Bens.

He glanced down at his bound hands. His wrists and shoulders had gone from aching to a hard, stabbing pain, but he didn’t wince as the Inquisitor regarded one of the blades, named it *Jophiel*, and plunged it into the polished wooden floorboards at her feet. He waited, but nothing happened.

“Boom?” he said eventually. “Was something supposed to happen there?”

“Shut up.” The Inquisitor’s tone was final. “And stay where you are.”

Ben stayed, watching with growing curiosity as she moved to his other side, named a second blade *Harahel*, and proceeded to drive that one into the floorboards as well.

With the third blade—*Sandalphon*—he realized what she was doing. The first blade had been driven into the floor just south of him, the next to the east, and the next to the north. She was marking out the points of a compass. He struggled to remember what this might mean, came up with nothing. This was clearly Clave ritual, beyond anything he’d been taught. By the time she reached the last blade, *Taharial*, his palms were sweating, chafing where they rubbed against each other.

The Inquisitor straightened, looking pleased with herself. “There.”

“There what?” Ben demanded, but she held a hand up.

“Not quite yet, Jonathan. There’s one more thing.” She moved to the southernmost blade and knelt in front of it. With a quick movement she produced a stele and marked a single dark rune into the floor just below the knife. As she rose to her feet, a high sharp sweet chime

sounded through the room, the sound of a delicate bell being struck. Light poured from the four angel blades, so blinding that Ben turned his face away, half-closing his eyes. When he turned back, a moment later, he saw that he was standing inside a cage whose walls looked as if they had been woven out of filaments of light. They were not static, but moving, like sheets of illuminated rain.

The Inquisitor was now a blurred figure behind a glowing wall. When Ben called out to her, even his voice sounded wavering and hollow, as if he were calling to her through water. “What is this? What have you done?”

She laughed.

Ben took an angry step forward, and then another; his shoulder brushed a glowing wall. As if he’d touched an electrified fence, the shock that pulsed through him was like a blow, knocking him off his feet. He tumbled awkwardly to the floor, unable to use his hands to break his fall.

The Inquisitor laughed again. “If you try to walk through the wall, you’ll get more than a shock. The Clave calls this particular punishment the Malachi Configuration. These walls can’t be broken as long as the seraph blades remain where they are. I wouldn’t,” she added, as Ben, kneeling, made a move toward the blade closest to him. “Touch the blades and you’ll die.”

“But *you* can touch them,” he said, unable to keep the loathing out of his voice.

“I can, but I won’t.”

“But what about food? Water?”

“All in good time, Jonathan.”

He got to his feet. Through the blurred wall, he saw her turn as if to go.

“But my hands—” He looked down at his bound wrists. The burning metal was eating into his skin like acid. Blood welled around the fiery manacles.

"You should have thought of that before you went to see Pennywise."

"You're not exactly making me fear the revenge of the Council. They can't be worse than you."

"Oh, you're not going to the Council," the Inquisitor said. There was a quiet calm in her tone that Ben did not like.

"What do you mean, I'm not going to the Council? I thought you said you were taking me to Derry tomorrow?"

"No. I'm planning to return you to your father."

The shock of her words almost knocked him back off his feet. "My *father*?"

"Your father. I'm planning to trade you to him for the Mortal Instruments."

Ben stared at her. "You must be joking."

"Not at all. It's simpler than a trial. Of course, you'll be banned from the Clave," she added, as a sort of afterthought, "but I assume you expected that."

Ben was shaking his head. "You have the wrong guy. I hope you realize that."

A look of annoyance flashed across her face. "I thought we'd dispensed with your pretense of innocence, Jonathan."

"I didn't mean me. I meant my father."

For the first time since he'd met her, she looked confused. "I don't understand what you mean."

"My father won't trade the Mortal Instruments for me." The words were bitter, but Ben's tone wasn't. It was matter-of-fact. "He'd let you kill me in front of him before he'd hand you either the Sword or the Cup."

The Inquisitor shook her head. "You don't understand," she said, and

there was a puzzling trace of resentment in her voice. “Children never do. The love a parent has for a child, there is nothing else like it. No other love so consuming. No father—not even Pennywise—would sacrifice his son for a hunk of metal, no matter how powerful.”

“You don’t know my father. He’ll laugh in your face and offer you some money to mail my body back to Derry.”

“Don’t be absurd—”

“You’re right,” Ben said. “Come to think of it, he’ll probably make you pay the shipping charges yourself.”

“I see that you’re still your father’s son. You don’t want him to lose the Mortal Instruments—it would be a loss of power to you as well. You don’t want to live out your life as the disgraced son of a criminal, so you’ll say anything to sway my decision. But you don’t fool me.”

“Listen.” Ben’s heart was pounding, but he tried to speak calmly. She had to believe him. “I know you hate me. I know you think I’m a liar like my father. But I’m telling you the truth now. My father absolutely believes in what he’s doing. You think he’s evil. But he thinks he’s right. He thinks he’s doing God’s work. He won’t give that up for me. You were tracking me when I went out there, you must have heard what he said—”

“I saw you speak to him,” said the Inquisitor. “I *heard* nothing.”

Ben cursed under his breath. “Look, I’ll swear any oath you want to prove I’m not lying. He’s using the Sword and the Cup to summon demons and control them. The more you waste your time with me, the more he can build up his army. By the time you realize he won’t make the trade, you’ll have no chance against him—”

The Inquisitor turned away with a noise of disgust. “I’m tired of your lies.”

Ben caught his breath in disbelief as she turned her back on him and stalked toward the door.

“Please!” he cried.

She stopped at the door and turned to look at him. Ben could only see the angular shadows of her face, the pointed chin, and dark hollows at her temples. Her gray clothes vanished into the shadows so that she looked like a bodiless floating skull. "Don't think," she said, "that returning you to your father is what I *want* to do. It's better than Bob Gray deserves."

"What does he deserve?"

"To hold the dead body of his child in his arms. To see his dead son and know that there is nothing he can do, no spell, no incantation, no bargain with hell that will bring him back—" She broke off. "He should *know*," she said, in a whisper, and pushed at the door, her hands scrabbling against the wood. It shut behind her with a click, leaving Ben, his wrists burning, staring after her in confusion.

Eddie hung up the phone with a frown. "No answer."

"Who is it you were trying to call?" Jim was on his fifth cup of coffee and Eddie was starting to worry about him. Surely there was such a thing as caffeine poisoning? He didn't seem on the verge of a fit or anything, but Eddie surreptitiously unplugged the percolator on his way back to the table, just in case. "Stan?"

"No. I feel weird waking him up during the daytime, though he said it doesn't bother him as long as he doesn't have to see day light."

"So..."

"I was calling Bill. I want to know what's going on with Ben."

"He didn't answer?"

"No." Eddie's stomach rumbled. He went to the refrigerator, removed a peach yogurt, and ate it mechanically, tasting nothing. He was halfway through the container when he remembered something. "Mike," he said. "We should check and see if he's okay." He set the yogurt down. "I'll go."

"No, I'm his pack leader. He trusts me. I can calm him down if he's

upset,” Jim said. “I’ll be right back.”

“Don’t say that,” Eddie begged. “I hate it when people say that.”

Jim smiled crookedly and ducked out into the hallway. Within a few minutes he was back, looking stunned. “He’s gone.”

“Gone? Gone how?”

“I mean he snuck out of the house. He left this.” He tossed a folded piece of paper onto the table. Eddie picked it up and read the scrawled sentences with a frown:

I'm sorry I left. Gone to make amends. Thank you for everything. Mike.

"Gone to make amends? What does that mean?"

Jim sighed. “I was hoping you would know.”

“Are you worried?"

"Raum demons are retrievers," Jim said. "They find people and bring them back to whoever summoned them. That demon could still be looking for her."

“Oh,” Eddie said in a small voice. “Well, my guess would be that she means he went to see Stan.”

Jim looked surprised. “Does he know where he lives?"

“I don’t know,” Eddie admitted. “They seem kind of close in a way. He might.” He fished into his pocket for his phone. “I’ll call him.”

“I thought calling him made you feel weird.”

“Not as weird as everything else that’s going on.” Eddie scrolled through his address book for Stan’s number. It rang three times before he picked up, sounding groggy.

“Hello?"

“It’s me.” He turned away from Jim as he spoke, more out of habit than from any desire to hide the conversation from him.

"You do know I'm nocturnal now," Stan said with groan. Eddie could hear him rolling over in bed. "That means I sleep all day."

"Are you at home?"

"Yeah, where else would I be?" His voice sharpened, sleep falling away. "What is it, Eddie, what's wrong?"

"Mike ran off. He left a note saying he might be going to your house."

Stan sounded puzzled. "Well, he didn't. Or if he did, he hasn't shown up yet."

"Is anyone else home but you?"

"No, my mom's at work and Leah has classes. Why, you really think Mike's going to show up here?"

"Just give us a call if he does—"

Stan cut him off. "Eddie." His tone was urgent. "Hang on a second. I think someone's trying to break into my house."

"Stan!" Clutching the phone, Eddie whirled toward Jim. "He says someone's trying to break into his house."

"Tell him to get out of there."

"I can't get out of here," Stan said tightly. "Not unless I want to catch on fire."

"Daylight," Eddie said to Jim, but he saw he'd already realized the problem and was searching for something in his pockets. Car keys. He held them up.

"Tell Stan we're coming. Tell him to lock himself in a room until we get there."

"Did you hear that? Lock yourself in a room."

"I heard." Stan's voice sounded tense; Eddie could hear a soft scraping sound, then a heavy thump.

“Stan!”

“I’m fine. I’m just piling things against the door.”

“What kind of things?” Eddie was out on the porch now, shivering in his thin sweater. Jim, behind him, was locking up the house.

“A desk,” Stan said with some satisfaction. “And my bed.”

“Your *bed*?” Eddie climbed up into the truck beside Jim, struggling one-handed with his seat belt as Jim peeled out of the driveway and rocketed down Kent. Jim reached over and buckled it. “How did you lift your bed?”

“You forget. Super vampire strength.”

“Ask him what he’s hearing,” Jim said. They were speeding down the street, which would have been fine if the Brooklyn waterfront had been better maintained. Eddie gasped every time they hit a pothole.

“What are you hearing?” he asked, catching his breath.

“I heard the front door crash in. I think someone must have kicked it open. Then Yossarian came streaking into my room and hid under the bed. That’s how I knew there was definitely someone in the house.”

“And now?”

“Now I don’t hear anything.”

“That’s good, right?” Eddie turned to Jim. “He says he doesn’t hear anything now. Maybe they went away.”

“Maybe.” Jim sounded doubtful. They were on the expressway now, speeding toward Stan’s neighborhood. “Keep him on the phone anyway.”

“What are you doing now, Stan?”

“Nothing. I’ve shoved everything in the room against the door. Now I’m trying to get Yossarian out from behind the heating vent.”

"Leave him where he is."

"This is all going to be very hard to explain to my mom," Stan said, and the phone went dead. There was a click and then nothing. CALL DISCONNECTED flashed on the digital display.

"No!" Eddie hit the redial button, her fingers trembling.

Stan picked up immediately. "Sorry. Yossarian scratched me and I dropped the phone."

Eddie's throat burned with relief. "That's fine, just as long as you're still okay and—"

A noise like a tidal wave crashed through the phone, obliterating Stan's voice. Eddie yanked the phone away from his ear. The display still read CALL CONNECTED.

"Stan!" he screamed into the phone. "Stan, can you hear me?"

The crashing noise stopped. There was the sound of something shattering, and a high, unearthly yowl—Yossarian? Then the sound of something heavy striking the ground.

"Stan?" Eddie whispered.

There was a click and then a drawling, amused voice spoke in his ear. "Edward," it said. "I should have known you'd be on the other end of this phone line."

Eddie squeezed his eyes shut, his stomach falling out from under him as if he were on a roller coaster that had just made its first drop. "Pennywise."

"You mean 'Father,'" he said, sounding genuinely annoyed.

"What I actually want to call you is a hell of a lot more unprintable than your name," he snapped. "Where's Stan?"

"You mean the vampire? Questionable company for a Shadowhunter boy of good family, don't you think? From now on I'll be expecting to have a say in your choice of friends."

“What did you do to Stan?”

“Nothing,” said Pennywise, amused. “Yet.”

And he hung up.

20. Family Remains

Time passed inside the prison, and Ben watched the shocking silver rain falling all around him with a detached sort of interest. His fingers had started to go numb, which he suspected was a bad sign, but he couldn't bring himself to care. He wondered if the Denbroughs knew he was up here, or if someone entering the training room would get a nasty surprise when they found him locked up in it. But no, the Inquisitor wasn't that sloppy. She would have told them the room was off-limits until she disposed of the prisoner in whatever manner she saw fit. He supposed he ought to be angry, even afraid, but he couldn't bring himself to care about that either. Nothing seemed real anymore: not the Clave, not the Covenant, not the Law, not even his father.

A soft footfall alerted him to the presence of someone else in the room. He'd been lying on his back, staring at the ceiling; now he sat up, his gaze flicking around the room. He could see a dark shape just beyond the shimmering rain-curtain. It must be the Inquisitor, back to sneer at him some more. He braced himself—then saw, with a jolt, the dark hair and familiar face.

Maybe there were still some things he cared about, after all. "Bill?"

"It's me." Bill knelt down on the other side of the glimmering wall. It was like looking at someone through clear water rippled with current; Ben could see Bill clearly now, but occasionally his features would seem to waver and dissolve as the fiery rain shimmered and undulated.

It was enough to make you seasick, Ben thought.

"W-what in the Angel's name is this stuff?" Bill reached out to touch the wall.

"Don't." Ben reached out, then drew back quickly before he made contact with the wall. "It'll shock you, maybe kill you if you try to pass through it."

Bill drew his hand back with a low whistle. "The Inquisitor m-meant

business.”

“Of course she did. I’m a dangerous criminal. Or hadn’t you heard?” Ben heard the acid in his own tone, saw Bill flinch, and was meanly, momentarily, glad.

“S-she didn’t call you a criminal, exactly…”

“No, I’m just a very naughty boy. I do all sorts of bad things. I kick kittens. I make rude gestures at nuns.”

“Don’t joke. This is s-serious stuff.” Bill’s eyes were somber. “What the hell were you thinking, g-going to see Pennywise? I mean, seriously, w-what was going through your head?”

“I was thinking that he’s my father.”

Bill looked as if he were mentally counting to ten to maintain his patience. “Ben—”

“What if it was *your* father? What would you do?”

“My father? My father w-would never do the things that Pennywise —”

Ben’s head jerked up. “Your father *did do those things!* He was in the Circle along with my father! Your mother, too! Our parents were all the same. The only difference is that yours got caught and punished, and mine didn’t!”

Bill’s face tightened. But “The only difference?” was all he said.

Ben looked down at his hands. The burning cuffs weren’t meant to be left on so long. The skin underneath them was dotted with beads of blood.

“I just m-meant,” Bill said, “that I don’t see how you could want to s-see him, not after what’s he’s done in general, b-but after what he did to *you*.”

Ben said nothing.

“All those years,” Bill said. “He let you think he w-was dead. Maybe you don’t remember what it was like when you were ten y-years old, but I do. Nobody who loved you could do—could do anything like that.”

Thin lines of blood were making their way down Ben’s hands, like red string unraveling. “Pennywise told me,” he said quietly, “that if I supported him against the Clave, if I did that, he’d make sure no one I cared about was hurt. Not you or Richie or Georgie. Not Eddie. Not your parents. He said—”

“No one w-would be hurt?” Bill echoed derisively. “You mean he wouldn’t hurt them himself. Nice.”

“I saw what he can do, Bill. The kind of demonic force he can summon. If he brings his demon army against the Clave, there will be a war. And people get hurt in wars. They die in wars.” He hesitated. “If you had the chance to save everyone you loved—”

“But w-what kind of chance is it? What’s Pennywise’s word even worth?”

“If he swears on the Angel that he’ll do something, he’ll do it. I know him.”

“*If* you support him against the Clave.”

Ben nodded.

“He must have been p-pretty pissed when you said no,” Bill observed.

Ben looked up from his bleeding wrists and stared. “What?”

“I said—”

“I know what you said. What makes you think I said no?”

“Well, you did. Didn’t you?”

Very slowly, Ben nodded.

“I know you,” Bill said, with supreme confidence, and stood up. “You

t-told the Inquisitor about Pennywise and his plans, didn't you? And she didn't care?"

"I wouldn't say she didn't care. More like she didn't really believe me. She's got a plan she thinks will take care of Pennywise. The only problem is, her plan sucks."

Bill nodded. "You c-can fill me in on that later. First things first: We have to figure out h-how to get you out of here."

"*What?*" Disbelief made Ben feel slightly dizzy. "I thought you came down right on the side of go directly to jail do not pass Go, do not collect two hundred dollars. 'The Law is the Law.' What was all that you were spouting?"

Bill looked astonished. "You c-can't have thought I *meant* that. I just wanted the Inquisitor to trust me so she wouldn't be w-watching me all the time like she's watching Richie and Georgie. She knows they're on your side."

"And you? Are you on my side?" Ben could hear the roughness in his own question and was almost overwhelmed by how much the answer meant to him.

"I'm w-with you," Bill said, "always. Why do you even have to ask? I may respect the Law, but what the Inquisitor has been doing to you has n-nothing to do with the Law. I don't know exactly what's going on, but the h-hatred she has for you is personal. It has n-nothing to do with the Clave."

"I bait her," said Ben. "I can't help it. Vicious bureaucrats get under my skin."

Bill shook his head. "It's n-not that either. It's an old hate. I can feel it."

Ben was about to answer when the cathedral bells began to ring. This close to the roof, the sound was echoingly loud. He glanced up—he still half-expected to see Gard flying among the wooden rafters in his slow, thoughtful circles. The raven had always liked it up there between the rafters and the arched stone ceiling. At the time, Ben

had thought the bird liked to dig his claws into the soft wood; now he realized the rafters had lent him an excellent vantage point for spying.

An idea began to take shape in the back of Ben's mind, dark and formless. Out loud he said only, "Jim said something about the Inquisitor having a son named Will. He said she was trying to get even for him. I asked her about him and she freaked out. I think it might have something to do with why she hates me so much."

The bells had stopped ringing. Bill said, "M-maybe. I could ask my parents, but I doubt they'd tell me."

"No, don't ask them. Ask Jim."

"Go all the way b-back to Brooklyn, you mean? Look, sneaking out of here is going to be all but i-impossible—"

"Text Eddie. Tell him to ask Jim."

Bill sighed. "F-fine."

By the time Bill came back into the training room, Jace was lying on the floor, envisioning lines of dancing girls in an effort to ignore the pain in his wrists. It wasn't working.

"W-what are you doing?" Bill asked, kneeling down as close to the shimmering wall of the prison as he could get. Ben tried to remind himself that when Bill asked this sort of question, he really meant it, and that it was something he had once found endearing rather than annoying. He failed.

"I thought I'd lie on the floor and writhe in pain for a while," he grunted. "It relaxes me."

"It does? Oh—you're being s-sarcastic." Bill said. "If you can sit up, you might want to. I'm going to try to slide something through the wall."

Ben sat up so quickly that his head spun. "Bill, don't—"

But Bill had already moved to push something toward him with both hands, as if he were rolling a ball to a child. A red sphere broke through the shimmering curtain and rolled to Ben, bumping gently against his knee.

“An apple.” He picked it up with some difficulty. “How appropriate.”

“I thought you m-might be hungry.”

“I am.” Ben took a bite of the apple; juice ran down his hands and sizzled in the blue flames that cuffed his wrists. “Did you text Eddie?”

“No. I left my phone in Richie's room and he w-won't let me get in. He just throws things against the door and screams. H-he said if I came in he'd jump out the window. He'd do it too.”

“Probably.”

“I get the feeling,” Bill said, and smiled, “I brought you something else, too. I don't k-know if it'll work, but it's worth a try.” He slid something small and metallic through the wall. It was a silvery disk about the size of a quarter.

Ben set the apple aside and picked the disk up curiously. “What's this?”

“I got it off the d-desk in the library. I've seen my parents use it before to take off restraints. I think it's an Unlocking r-rune. It's worth trying—”

He broke off as Ben touched the disk to his wrists, holding it awkwardly between two fingers. The moment it touched the line of blue flame, the cuff flickered and vanished.

“Thanks.” Ben rubbed his wrists, each one braceleted with a line of chafed, bleeding skin. He was starting to be able to feel his fingertips again. “It's not a file hidden in a birthday cake, but it'll keep my hands from falling off.”

Bill looked at him. The wavering lines of the rain-curtain made his face look elongated, worried—or maybe he *was* worried. “W-when Richie told me he was gonna j-jump out the window. I thought of

saying he could die. B-but he wouldn't, he's really agile."

Ben nodded. "I'm sure he is."

"I started w-wondering if that w-was true in your case too—I mean, I've seen you do things that were practically flying. I've seen you fall three stories and land like a c-cat, jump from the ground to a roof—"

"I'm not sure what your point is, Bill."

"My point is that there are f-four walls to this prison, not five."

Ben stared at him. "So Keene wasn't lying when he said we'd actually use geometry in our daily lives. You're right, Bill. There are four walls to this cage. Now if the Inquisitor had gone with two, I might —"

"BEN," Bill said, losing patience. "I m-mean, there's no top to the cage. Nothing between you and the ceiling."

Ben craned his head back. The rafters seemed to sway dizzily high above him, lost in shadow. "You're crazy."

"M-maybe," Bill said. "Maybe I just know what you can do." He shrugged. "You could t-try, at least."

Ben looked at Bill—at his open, honest face and steady blue eyes. *He is crazy*, Ben thought. It was true, in the heat of fighting, he'd done some amazing things, but so had they all. Shadowhunter blood, years of training ... but he couldn't jump thirty feet straight up into the air.

How do you know you can't, said a soft voice in his head, *if you've never tried it?* He thought of Eddie and his runes, of the Silent City and the handcuff popping off his wrist as if it had cracked under some enormous pressure. He and Eddie shared the same blood. If Eddie could do things that shouldn't be possible...

He got to his feet, almost reluctantly, and looked around, taking slow stock of the room. He could still see the floor-length mirrors and the multitude of weapons hanging on the walls, their blades glinting dully, through the curtain of silver fire that surrounded him. He bent and retrieved the half-eaten apple off the floor, looked at it for a

thoughtful moment—then cocked his arm back and threw it as hard as he could. The apple sailed through the air, hit a shimmering silver wall, and burst into a corona of molten blue flame.

Ben heard Bill gasp. So the Inquisitor *hadn't* been exaggerating. If he hit one of the prison walls too hard, he'd die. Bill was on his feet, suddenly wavering. "Ben, I don't know—"

"Shut up, Bill. And don't watch me. It's not helping."

Whatever Bill said in response, Ben didn't hear it. He was doing a slow pivot in place, his eyes focused on the rafters. The runes that gave him excellent long sight kicked in, the rafters coming into better focus: He could see their chipped edges, their whorls and knots, the black stains of age. But they were solid. They'd held up the Institute roof for hundreds of years. They could hold a teenage boy. He flexed his fingers, taking deep, slow, controlled breaths, just as his father had taught him. In his mind's eye he saw himself leaping, soaring, catching hold of a rafter with ease and swinging himself up onto it. He was light, he told himself, light as an arrow, winging its way easily through the air, swift and unstoppable. It would be easy, he told himself. Easy.

"I am Pennywise's arrow," Ben whispered. "Whether he knows it or not."

And he jumped.

Eddie hit the button to call Stan back but the phone went straight to voice mail. Hot tears splashed down his cheeks and he threw his own phone at the dashboard. "Damn it, damn it—"

"We're almost there," Jim said. They'd gotten off the expressway and he hadn't even noticed. They pulled up in front of Stan's house, a wooden one-family whose front was painted a cheerful red. Eddie was out of the car and running up the front walk before Jim had even yanked on the security brake. He could hear him yelling his name as he dashed up the steps and pounded frantically on the front door.

“Stan!” Eddie shouted. “Stan!”

“Eddie, enough.” Jim caught up to him on the front porch. “The neighbors—”

“Screw the neighbors.” Eddie fumbled for the key ring on his belt, found the right key, and slid it into the lock. He swung the door open and stepped warily into the hallway, Jim just behind him. They peered through the first door on the left into the kitchen. Everything looked exactly as it always had, from the meticulously clean counter to the fridge magnets. Sunshine streamed in through the windows, filling the room with pale yellow light. Light that was capable of charring Stan away to ashes.

Stan’s room was the last one at the end of the hall. The door stood slightly open, though Eddie could see nothing but darkness through the crack.

He slid his stele out of his pocket and gripped it tightly. He knew it wasn’t really a weapon, but the feel of it in his hand was calming. Inside, the room was dark, black curtains drawn across the windows, the only light coming from the digital clock on the bedside table. Jim was reaching across him to flip on the light when something—something that hissed and spit and snarled like a demon—launched itself at him out of the darkness.

Eddie screamed as Jim seized his shoulders and pushed him roughly aside. Eddie stumbled and nearly fell; when he righted himself, he turned to see an astonished-looking Jim holding a yowling, struggling white cat, its fur sticking out all over. It looked like a ball of cotton with claws.

“Yossarian!” Eddie exclaimed.

Jim dropped the cat. Yossarian immediately shot between his legs and disappeared down the hall.

“Stupid cat,” Eddie said.

“It’s not his fault. Cats don’t like me.” Jim reached for the light switch and flipped it on. Eddie gasped. The room was completely in order,

nothing at all out of place, not even the rug askew. Even the coverlet was folded neatly on the bed. "Is it a glamour?"

"Probably not. Probably just magic." Jim moved into the center of the room, looking around him thoughtfully. As he moved to pull one of the curtains aside, Eddie saw something gleam in the carpet at his feet.

"Jim, wait." He went to where he was standing and knelt to retrieve the object. It was Stan's silver cell phone, badly bent out of shape. Despite the crack that ran the length of the display screen, a single text message was still visible: NOW I HAVE THEM ALL.

Eddie sank down on the bed in a daze. Distantly, he felt Jim pluck the phone out of his hand. He heard him suck in his breath as he read the message.

"What does that mean? 'Now I have them all'?" asked Eddie.

Jim set Stan's phone down on the desk and passed a hand over his face. "I'm afraid it means that now he has Stan and, we might as well face it, Mike, too. It means he has everything he needs for the Ritual of Conversion."

Eddie stared at him. "You mean this isn't just about getting at me—and you?"

"I'm sure Pennywise regards that as a pleasant side effect. But it's not his main goal. His main goal is to reverse the characteristics of the Soul-Sword. And for that he needs—"

"The blood of Downworlder children. But Mike and Stan aren't children. They're teenagers."

"When that spell was created, the spell to turn the Soul-Sword to darkness, the word 'teenager' hadn't even been invented. In Shadowhunter society, you're an adult when you're eighteen. Before that, you're a child. For Pennywise's purposes, Mike and Stan are children. He has the blood of a faerie child already, and the blood of a warlock child. All he needed was a werewolf and a vampire."

Eddie felt as if the air had been punched out of him. "Then why

didn't we do something? Why didn't we think of protecting them somehow?"

"So far Pennywise has done what's convenient. None of his victims were chosen for any other reason than that they were there and available. The warlock was easy to find; all Pennywise had to do was hire him under the pretense of wanting a demon raised. It's simple enough to spot faeries in the park if you know where to look. And the Hunter's Moon is exactly where you'd go if you wanted to find a werewolf. Putting himself to this extra danger and trouble just to strike out at us when nothing's changed—"

"Ben." said Eddie.

"What do you mean, 'Ben'? What about him?"

"I think it's Ben he's trying to get back at. Ben must have done something last night on the boat, something that really pissed Pennywise off. Pissed him off enough to abandon whatever plan he had before and make a new one."

"Richie!" Bill pounded on his brother's door. "Richie, open the door. I know you're in there."

The door opened a crack. Bill tried to peer through it, but no one appeared to be on the other side. "He doesn't want to talk to you," said a well-known voice.

Bill glanced down and saw gray eyes glaring at him from behind a bent pair of spectacles. "Georgie," he said. "C-come on, little brother, let me in."

"I don't want to talk to you either." Georgie started to push the door shut, but Bill, quick as a flick of Ben's whip, wedged his foot into the gap.

"D-don't make me knock you over, Georgie."

"You wouldn't." Georgie pushed back with all his might.

"No, but I m-might go get our parents, and I have a feeling Richie doesn't w-want that. Do you, Richie?" he demanded, pitching his voice loud enough for his brother, inside the room, to hear.

"Oh, for God's sake." Richie sounded furious. "All right, Georgie. Let him in."

Georgie stepped away and Bill pushed his way in, letting the door swing half-shut behind him. Richie was kneeling in the embrasure of the window beside his bed. He was wearing his hunting gear.

Richie glared at him, reminding Bill for a moment of nothing more than Gard, Keene's black raven.

"W-what the hell are you doing?" he demanded, striding furiously across the room toward his brother.

"Don't come any closer to me, William Denbrough," he said in his angriest voice. "I'm not feeling very charitable toward you at the moment."

"Richie..."

A low chuckle broke the tension. "All right, all right. I'm here."

Richie's eyes flew wide. "Ben!"

Ben ducked into Richie's room, shutting the door behind him. "No need for the two of you to fight—" He winced as Georgie careened into him, yelping his name. "Careful there," he said, gently disentangling the boy. "I'm not in the best shape right now."

"I can see that," Richie said, his eyes raking him anxiously. Ben's wrists were bloody, his hair was plastered sweatily to his neck and forehead, and his face and hands were stained with dirt and ichor. "Did the Inquisitor hurt you?"

"Not too badly." Ben's eyes met Bill's across the room. "She just locked me up in the weapons gallery. Bill helped me get out."

Richie's head turned to Bill. "Bill, is that true?"

"Yes." He couldn't resist adding: "So *there*."

"Well, you should have *said*."

"And you should h-have had some faith in me—"

"Enough. There's no time for bickering," Ben said. "Richie, what kind of weapons do you have in here? And bandages, any bandages?"

"Bandages?" Richie got out of the window and took his stele out of a drawer. "I can fix you up with an *iratze*—"

Ben raised his wrists. "An *iratze* would be good for my bruises, but it won't help these. These are rune burns." They looked even worse in the bright light of Richie's room—the circular scars were black and cracked in places, oozing blood and clear fluid. He lowered his hands as Richie paled. "And I'll need some weapons, too, before I—"

"Bandages first. Weapons later." Richie set his stele down on top of the dresser and herded Ben into the bathroom with a basketful of ointments, gauze pads, and bandage strips. Bill watched them through the half-open door, Ben leaning against the sink as his adoptive brother sponged his wrists and wrapped them in white gauze. "Okay, now take your shirt off."

"I knew there was something in this for you." Ben slid off his jacket and drew his T-shirt over his head, wincing. His skin was pale gold, layered over hard muscle. Black ink Marks twined his slim arms. A mundane might have thought the white scars that snowflaked Ben's skin, remnants of old runes, made him less than perfect, but Bill didn't. They all had those scars; they were badges of honor, not flaws.

Bill found his phone in Richie's bed, frowning when he saw it wouldn't turn on.

"Georgie!" He hissed. "W-where you using my phone again?"

The boy shrugged. "I was playing *Angry Birds*."

Ben, seeing Bill watching him through the half-open door, said, "Bill, can you get the phone?"

"It's on the dresser." Richie didn't look up. He and Ben were conversing in low tones; Bill couldn't hear them, but suspected this was because they were trying not to scare Georgie.

Bill looked. "It's *not* on the dresser."

Richie, tracing an *iratzte* on Richie's back, swore in annoyance. "Oh, crap. I left my phone in the kitchen. Crap. I don't want to go looking for it in case the Inquisitor's around."

"I'll get it," Georgie offered. "She doesn't care about me, I'm too young."

"I suppose." Richie sounded reluctant. "What do you need the phone for, Bill?"

"W-we just need it," Bill said impatiently.

"Okay," Georgie said. "I'll be right back."

He slipped out the door as Ben pulled his shirt and jacket back on and came back into the bedroom, where he commenced looking for weapons in the piles of Richie's belongings that were strewn around the floor. Richie followed him, shaking his head. "What's the plan now? Are we all leaving? The Inquisitor's going to freak when she finds out you're not there anymore."

"Not as much as she'll freak when Pennywise turns her down." Tersely, Ben outlined the Inquisitor's plan. "The only problem is, he'll never go for it."

"The—the *only* problem?" Richie was so furious he was almost stuttering, something he hadn't done since he was six. "She can't do that! She can't just trade you away to a psychopath! You're a member of the Clave! You're our *brother!*"

"The Inquisitor doesn't think so."

"I don't care what she thinks. She's a hideous bitch and she has got to be stopped."

"Once she finds out her plan is seriously flawed, she might be able to

be talked down,” Ben observed. “But I’m not sticking around to find out. I’m getting out of here.”

“It’s not going to b-be easy,” Bill said. “The Inquisitor’s got this place locked up tighter than a p-pentagram. You know there are guards downstairs? She’s c-called in half the Conclave.”

“She must think highly of me,” said Ben, tossing aside a pile of magazines.

“Maybe she’s not wrong.” Richie looked at him thoughtfully. “Did you seriously jump thirty feet out of a Malachi Configuration? Did he, Bill?”

“He did,” Bill confirmed. “I’ve n-never seen anything like it.”

“I’ve never seen anything like *this*.” Ben lifted a ten-inch dagger from the floor. One of Richie’s white briefs was speared on the wickedly sharp tip. Richie snatched it off, scowling.

“That’s not the point. *How* did you do it? Do you know?”

“I jumped.” Ben pulled two razor-edged spinning disks out from under the bed. They were covered in orange cat hair. He blew on them, scattering fur. “*Chakhrams*. Cool. Especially if I meet any demons with serious dander allergies.”

Richie thwacked him with the underwear. “You’re not answering me!”

“Because I don’t know, Richie.” Ben scrambled to his feet. “Maybe the Seelie Queen was right. Maybe I have powers I don’t even know about because I’ve never tested them. Eddie certainly does.”

Richie wrinkled his forehead at the name, but didn’t say anything.

Bill’s eyes widened suddenly. “Richie—is that vampire cycle of yours still up on the roof?”

“Possibly. But it’s daylight, so it’s not much use. Besides,” Richie pointed out, “we can’t all fit on it.”

Ben slid the chakrams onto his belt, along with the ten-inch dagger. Several angel blades went into his jacket pockets. "That doesn't matter," he said. "You're not coming with me."

Richie spluttered. "What do you mean, we're not—" He broke off as Georgie returned, out of breath and clutching his phone. "Georgie, you're a hero." He snatched the phone from him, shooting a glare at Ben. "I'll get back to you in a minute. Meanwhile, who are we calling?"

"I'll call Eddie—" Bill began.

Richie flinched. Ben rolled his eyes and snatched the phone out of his hand. "I'll do it." He was already dialing. "Eddie? It's Ben. I'm fine, I—*What?*" The color in his face vanished as if it had been wiped away, leaving him gray and staring. "How is that possible? But why—"

"How is what possible?" Richie was at his side in two strides. "Ben, what's happened? Is Eddie—"

Ben drew the phone away from his ear, his knuckles white. "It's Pennywise. He's taken Stan and Mike. He's going to use them to perform the Ritual."

In one smooth motion, Richie reached over and plucked the phone out of Ben's hand. He put it to his ear. "Drive to the Institute," he said. "Don't come in. Wait for us." He hanged up and handed the phone to Ben. "Call Eleven," he said. "Tell her to meet us down by the waterfront in Brooklyn. She can pick the place, but it should be somewhere deserted. We're going to need her help getting to Pennywise's ship."

"I told you, you're not coming" Ben sounded annoyed.

"It's not a debate, I'm coming with you." Richie said in a firm tone. He turned to Bill. "When Pennywise doesn't come through with his part of the deal, you're the one who are going to have to convince the Inquisitor to send all the backup the Conclave has got after Pennywise."

"Richie," Ben sounded exasperated. "This is *not* your fight."

"It is now." He said, and jumped up onto his windowsill. Ben cried out, but Richie was already ducking through the window opening. He balanced for a moment on the sill outside—and then he was gone.

21. A Stone of the Heart

The sound of water woke him. It was a heavy repetitive sound—water sloshing against something solid, over and over, as if he were lying in the bottom of a pool that was rapidly draining and refilling itself. There was the taste of metal in his mouth and the smell of metal all around. He was conscious of a nagging, persistent pain in his left hand. With a groan, Stan opened his eyes.

He was lying on a hard, bumpy metal floor painted an ugly gray-green. The walls were the same green metal. There was a single high round window in one wall, letting in only a little sunlight, but it was enough. He'd been lying with his hand in a patch of it and his fingers were red and blistered. With another groan, he rolled away from the light and sat up.

And realized he wasn't alone in the room. Though the shadows were thick, he could see in the dark just fine. Across from him, their hands bound together and chained to a large steam pipe, was Mike. His clothes were torn and there was a massive bruise across his left cheek. Stan could see his hair matted with blood. The moment he sat up, Mike stared at him and burst immediately into tears. "I thought," he hiccupped between sobs, "that you—were dead."

"I *am* dead," Stan said. He was staring at his hand. As he watched, the blisters fading, the pain lessening, the skin resuming its normal pallor.

"I know, but I meant—really dead." Mike swiped at his face with his bound hands. Stan tried to move toward him, but something brought him up short. A metal cuff around his ankle was attached to a thick metal chain sunk into the floor. Pennywise was taking no chances.

"Don't cry," Stan said, and immediately regretted it. It wasn't as if the situation didn't warrant tears. "I'm fine."

"For now," said Mike, rubbing his wet face against his sleeve. "That man—the one with the white hair—his name is Pennywise?"

"You saw him?" Stan said. "I didn't see anything. Just my front door

blowing in and then a massive shape that came at me like a freight train."

"He's *the* Pennywise, right? The one everyone talks about. The one who started the Uprising."

"He's Ben and Eddie's father," Stan said. "That's what I know about him."

"I thought his voice sounded familiar. He sounds just like Ben." Mike looked momentarily rueful.

Stan didn't say anything.

"So you didn't..." Mike's voice trailed off. He tried again. "Look, I know this sounds weird, but when Pennywise came for you, did you see someone you recognized with him, someone who's dead? Like a ghost?"

Stan shook his head, bewildered. "No. Why?"

Mike hesitated. "I saw my brother. The ghost of my brother. I think Pennywise was making me hallucinate."

"Well, he didn't try anything like that on me. I was on the phone with Eddie. I remember dropping it when the shape came at me—" He shrugged. "That's it."

"With Eddie?" Mike looked almost hopeful. "Then maybe they'll figure out where we are. Maybe they'll come after us."

"Maybe," Stan said. "Where are we, anyway?"

"On a boat. I was still conscious when he brought me onto it. It's a big black hulking metal thing. There are no lights and there are—things everywhere. One of them jumped out at me and I started screaming. That was when he grabbed my head and banged it into the wall. I passed out for a while after that."

"Things? What do you mean things?"

"Demons," Mike said, and shuddered. "He has all sorts of demons

here. Big ones and little ones and flying ones. They do whatever he tells them.”

“But Pennywise’s a Shadowhunter. And from all I’ve heard, he *hates* demons.”

“Well, they don’t appear to know that,” said Mike. “What I don’t get is what he wants with us. I know he hates Downworlders, but this seems like a lot of effort just to kill two of them.” He had started to shiver, his jaws clicking together like the chattery-teeth toys you could buy in novelty stores. “He must want something from the Shadowhunters. Or Jim.”

I know what he wants, Stan thought, but there was no point in telling Mike; he was upset enough already.

“Aren’t you cold?” Mike asked, his lips trembling.

Stan shook his head. The burn on his hand was entirely gone now. “I don’t feel the cold. Not anymore.”

Mike opened his mouth, then closed it again. A struggle was taking place behind his eyes. “I’m sorry. About the way I reacted to you yesterday.” He paused, almost holding his breath. “Vampires scare me to death,” he whispered at last. “When I first came to the city, I had a pack I used to hang out with—Lucas, and two other boys, Kyle and Gregg. We were in the park once and we ran into some vamps sucking on blood bags under a bridge—there was a fight and I mostly remember one of the vamps just picking Gregg up, just picking him up, and ripping him in half—” His voice rose, and he clamped a hand over his mouth. He was shaking. “In half,” he whispered. “All his insides fell out. And then they started eating.”

Stan felt a dull pang of nausea roll over him. He was almost glad that the story made him sick to his stomach, rather than something else. Like hungry. “I wouldn’t do that,” he said. “I like werewolves. I like Jim—”

“I know you do.” Mike’s mouth worked. “It’s just that when I met you, you seemed so *human*. You reminded me what I used to be like, before.”

"Mike," Stan said. "You're still human."

"No, I'm not."

"In the ways that count, you are. Just like me."

Mike tried to smile. Stan could tell he didn't believe him, and he hardly blamed him. Stan wasn't sure he believed himself.

The sky had turned to gunmetal, weighted with heavy clouds. In the gray light the Institute loomed up, huge as the slabbed side of a mountain. The angled slate roof shone like unpolished silver. Eddie thought he had caught the movement of hooded figures in the shadows by the front door, but he wasn't sure. It was hard to tell anything clearly when they were parked over a block away, peering through the smeared windows of Jim's truck.

"How long has it been?" Eddie asked, for either the fourth or fifth time, he wasn't sure.

"Five minutes longer than the last time you asked me," Jim said. He was leaning back in his seat, his head back, looking utterly exhausted. The stubble coating his jaw and cheek was silvery gray and there were black lines of shadow under his eyes. All those nights at the hospital, the demon attack, and now this, Eddie thought, suddenly worried. Eddie could see why Jim and his mother had hidden from this life for so long. He wished he could hide from it himself. "Do you want to go in?"

"No. Richie said to wait outside." He peered out the window again. Now he was sure there were figures in the doorway. As one of them turned, he thought he caught a flash of silvery hair—

"Look." Jim was sitting bolt upright, rolling his window down hastily.

Eddie looked. Nothing appeared to have changed. "You mean the people in the doorway?"

"No. The guards were there before. Look on the roof." He pointed.

Eddie pressed his face to the truck window. The slate roof of the cathedral was a riot of Gothic turrets and spires, carved angels, and arched embrasures. He was about to say irritably that he didn't notice anything other than some crumbling gargoyles, when a flash of movement caught his eyes. Someone was up on the roof. A slim, dark figure, moving swiftly among the turrets, darting from one overhang to another, now dropping flat, to edge down the impossibly steep roof—someone with black hair that glinted in the gunmetal light like brass—

Richie.

Eddie was out of the truck before he knew what he was doing, pounding down the street toward the church, Jim shouting after him. The huge edifice seemed to sway overhead, hundreds of feet high, a sheer cliff of stone. Richie was at the edge of the roof now, looking down, and Eddie thought, *It can't be, he wouldn't, he wouldn't do this, not Richie*, and then he stepped off the roof into empty air, as calmly as if he were stepping off a porch. Eddie screamed out loud as Richie fell like a stone—

And landed lightly on his feet just in front of him. Eddie stared with his mouth open as Richie rose up out of a shallow crouch and grinned at him. "If I made a joke about just dropping in," he said, "would you write me off as a cliché?"

Mike had fallen into a fitful doze against the steam pipe. Stan watched the light from the porthole move across the room and tried in vain to calculate the hours. Usually he used his cell phone to tell him what time it was, but that was gone—he'd searched his pockets in vain. He must have dropped it when Pennywise charged into his room.

He had bigger concerns, though. His mouth was dry and papery, his throat aching. He was thirsty in a way that was like every thirst and hunger he'd ever known blended together to form a sort of exquisite torture. And it was only going to get worse.

Blood was what he needed. He thought of the blood in the

refrigerator beside his bed at home, and his veins burned like hot silver wires running just under his skin.

"Stan?" It was Mike, lifting his head groggily. His cheek was printed with white dents where it had lain against the bumpy pipe. As he watched, the blood returned to Mike's face.

Blood. He ran his dry tongue around his lips. "Yeah?"

"How long was I asleep?"

"Three hours. Maybe four. It's probably afternoon by now."

"Oh. Thanks for keeping watch."

He hadn't been. He felt vaguely ashamed as he said, "Of course. No problem."

"Stan..."

"Yes?"

"I hope you know what I mean when I say I'm sorry you're here, but I'm glad you're with me."

Stan felt his face crack into a smile. His dry lower lip split and he tasted blood in his mouth. His stomach groaned. "Thanks."

Mike leaned toward him, the jacket slipping from his shoulders. His eyes were a light amber-gray that changed as he moved. "Can you reach me?" he asked, holding out his hand.

Stan thought this was the gayest thing he had ever done in the last sixteen years of his life, but didn't say anything. In that moment, Mike reminded Stan of Eddie, of that day when they were kids and Eddie fall out of a tree. When they were in the hospital, Eddie said "*Can you stay?*" It was all it took for Stan to stay in that room until he recovered.

If he was gonna die in this place, maybe having Mike around wasn't that bad.

Stan reached for him. The chain that secured his ankle rattled as he stretched his hand as far as it would go. Mike smiled as their fingertips brushed—

“How touching.” Stan jerked his hand back, staring. The voice that had spoken out of the shadows was cool, cultured, vaguely foreign in a way he couldn’t quite place. Mike dropped his hand and twisted around, the color draining from his face as he stared up at the man in the doorway. The man had come in so quietly neither one of them had heard him. “The children of Moon and Night, getting along at last.”

“Pennywise,” Mike whispered.

Stan said nothing. He couldn’t stop staring. So this was Eddie and Ben’s father. With his cap of white-silver hair and burning black eyes, he didn’t look much like either one of them, though there was something of Eddie in his sharp bone structure and the shape of his eyes, and something of Ben in the lounging insolence with which he moved.

He was a big man, broad-shouldered with a thick frame that didn’t resemble either of his children’s. He padded into the green metal room like a cat, despite being weighted down with what looked like enough weaponry to outfit a platoon. Thick black leather straps with silver buckles crisscrossed his chest, holding a wide-hilted silver sword across his back. Another thick strap circled his waist, and through it was thrust a butcher’s array of knives, daggers, and narrow shimmering blades like enormous needles.

“Get up,” he said to Stan. “Keep your back against the wall.”

Stan tilted his chin up. He could see Mike watching him, white-faced and scared, and felt a rush of fierce protectiveness. He would keep Pennywise from hurting him if it was the last thing he did.

“So you’re Eddie’s father,” Stan said. “No offense, but I can kind of see why he hates you.”

Pennywise’s face was impassive, almost motionless. His lips barely moved as he said, “And why is that?”

"Because," Stan said, "you're obviously psychotic."

Now Pennywise smiled. It was a smile that moved no part of his face other than his lips, and those twisted only slightly. Then he brought his fist up. It was clenched; Stan thought for a moment that Pennywise was going to swing at him, and he flinched reflexively. But Pennywise didn't throw the punch. Instead, he opened his fingers, revealing a shimmering pile of what looked like glitter in the center of his broad palm. Turning toward Mike, he bent his head and blew the powder at him in a grotesque parody of a blown kiss. The powder settled on Mike like a swarm of shimmering bees.

Mike screamed. Gasping and jerking wildly, he thrashed from side to side as if he could twist away from the powder, his voice rising in a sobbing scream.

"What did you do to him?" Stan shouted, leaping to his feet. He ran at Pennywise, but the leg chain jerked him back. "*What did you do?*"

Pennywise's thin smile widened. "Silver powder," he said. "It burns lycanthropes."

Mike had stopped twitching and was curled into a fetal position on the floor, weeping quietly. Blood ran from vicious red scores along his hands and arms. Stan's stomach lurched again and he fell back against the wall, sickened by himself, by all of it. "You bastard," he said as Pennywise idly brushed the last of the powder from his fingers. "He's just a boy, he wasn't going to hurt you, he's *chained up* , for—"

He choked, his throat burning.

Pennywise laughed. "For God's sake?" he said. "Is that what you were going to say?"

Stan said nothing. Pennywise reached over his shoulder and drew the heavy silver Sword from its sheath. Light played along its blade like water slipping down a sheer silver wall, like sunlight itself refracted. Stan's eyes stung and he turned his face away.

"The Angel blade burns you, just as God's name chokes you," said

Pennywise, his cool voice sharp as crystal. “They say that those who die upon its point will achieve the gates of heaven. In which case, revenant, I am doing you a favor.” He lowered the blade so that the tip touched Stan’s throat. Pennywise’s eyes were the color of black water and there was nothing in them: no anger, no compassion, not even any hate. They were empty as a hollowed-out grave. “Any last words?”

Stan knew what he was supposed to say. *Sh’mā Yisrael, adonai elohanu, adonai echod*. Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. He tried to speak the words, but a searing pain burned his throat. “*Eddie*,” he whispered instead.

A look of annoyance passed across Pennywise’s face, as if the sound of his son’s name in a vampire’s mouth displeased him. With a sharp flick of his wrist, he brought the Sword level and slashed it with a single smooth gesture across Stan’s throat.

22. Before Sunset

"Thanks for waiting for me by the way." Ben's voice brought Eddie back to focus, he looked over from Richie, seeing Ben. The sun gave his brown hair a golden tone and the eyebags on his face, Eddie noticed he was wearing bandages around his wrists and there were flecks of blood around his head.

"Ben!" Relief passed over Eddie's entire body, and in just twondering seconds, he was hugging him, like the way brothers were supposed to do. Because brothers hugged, right?

Ben flinched at the hug. "Careful, Eddie," he patted Eddie's back. "I'm not really in a good shape."

"God," Eddie pulled away and touched his face. "Are you hurt? What happened to you?"

"We don't have time for this," Richie gestured to the truck. "Let's go."

Eddie frowned. "You're coming with us?"

Richie rolled his eyes. "I didn't jump out of my room for nothing."

"Richie's right," Ben said, grabbing Eddie's arm. "We have to go."

"What about Bill?" Eddie asked.

"He's staying to alert the Inquisitor if things get bad." Richie said.

"*When* things get bad." Ben corrected, and didn't say anything else as they climbed the truck.

"You jumped a ten feet prison?" Eddie asked Ben, bewildered, as the truck sped uptown.

Ben shrugged. "It was more than ten feet."

"How the hell did you do that?"

"I don't know." He raised his hands to rub at his eyes. "How did you create that rune?"

"I don't know either," Eddie whispered. "The Seelie Queen was right, wasn't she? Pennywise, he—he did *things* to us." He glanced over at Jim, who was pretending to be absorbed in turning left. "Didn't he?"

"This isn't the time to talk about that," Jim said. "Ben, did you have a particular destination in mind or did you just want to get away from the Institute?"

"Pennywise's taken Mike and Stan to the boat to perform the Ritual. He'll want to do it as soon as possible." Ben tugged at one of the bandages on his wrist. "I've got to get there and stop him."

"No," Jim said sharply.

"Okay, we have to get there and stop him."

"Ben, I'm not having you go back to that ship. It's too dangerous."

"There's no time for that. After my father kills your friends, he'll call on an army of demons you can't even imagine. After that, he'll be unstoppable."

"Then the Clave—"

"The Inquisitor won't do anything," Ben said. "She's blocked the Denbroughs' access to the Clave. She wouldn't call for reinforcements, even when I told her what Pennywise has planned. She's obsessed with this insane plan she has."

"What plan?" Eddie said.

Ben's voice was bitter. "She wanted to trade me to my father for the Mortal Instruments. I told her Pennywise would never go for it, but she didn't believe me." He laughed, a sharp staccato laugh. "Bill is going to tell her what happened with Stan and Mike. I'm not too optimistic, though. She doesn't believe me about Pennywise and she's not going to upset her precious plan just to save a couple of Downworlders."

"We can't just wait to hear from them, anyway," Eddie said. "We have to get to the boat now. If you can take us to it—"

"I hate to break it to you, but we need a boat to get to another boat," said Jim. "I'm not sure even Ben can walk on water."

At that moment Eddie's phone buzzed. It was a text message from Beverly. Eddie frowned. "It's an address. Down by the waterfront."

Richie looked over his shoulder. "That's where we have to go to meet Eleven." He read the address off to Jim, who executed an irritable U-turn and headed south.

"Eleven will get us across the water," Ben explained. "The ship is surrounded by protection wards. I got onto it before because my father wanted me to get onto it. This time he won't. We'll need Eleven to deal with the wardings."

"I don't like this." Jim tapped his fingers on the steering wheel. "I think I should go and you three should stay with Eleven."

Ben's eyes flashed. "No. It has to be me who goes."

"Why?" Eddie asked.

"Because Pennywise's using a fear demon," Ben explained. "That's how he was able to kill the Silent Brothers. It's what slaughtered that warlock, the werewolf in the alley outside the Hunter's Moon, and probably what killed that fey child in the park. And it's why the Brothers had those looks on their faces. Those terrified looks. They were literally scared to death."

"But the blood—"

"He drained the blood later. And in the alley he was interrupted by one of the lycanthropes. That's why he didn't have enough time to get the blood he needed. And that's why he still needs Mike." Ben raked a hand through his hair. "No one can stand up against the fear demon. It gets in your head and destroys your mind."

"Agramon," said Jim. He'd been silent, staring through the windshield. His face looked gray and pinched.

"Yeah, that's what Pennywise called it."

"He's not a fear demon. He's *the* fear demon. The Demon of Fear. How did Pennywise get Agramon to do his bidding? Even a warlock would have trouble binding a Greater Demon, and outside the pentagram—" Jim sucked his breath in. "That's how the warlock child died, isn't it? Summoning Agramon?"

Ben nodded. "The Mortal Cup," he finished, "lets him control Agramon. Apparently it gives you some power over demons. Not like the Sword does, though."

"Now I'm even less inclined to let you go," Jim said. "It's a Greater Demon, Ben. It would take this city's worth of Shadowhunters to deal with it."

"I actually agree with Jim," Richie raised his hand.

"If Eddie can put the Fearless rune on me, I can take it down. Or at least try." Ben said.

"No!" Eddie protested. "I don't want your safety dependent on my stupid rune. What if it doesn't work?"

"It worked before," Ben said as they turned off the bridge and headed back into Brooklyn. They were rolling down narrow Van Brunt Street, between high brick factories whose boarded-up windows and padlocked doors betrayed no hint of what lay inside. In the distance, the waterfront glimmered between buildings.

"Are you sure this is the address?" asked Jim, bringing the truck to a slow stop. "Eleven isn't here."

Eddie glanced around. They had drawn up in front of a large factory, which looked as if it had been destroyed by a terrible fire. The hollow brick and plaster walls still stood, but metal struts poked through them, bent and pitted with burns. In the distance Eddie could see the financial district of lower Manhattan and the black hump of Governors Island, farther out to sea. "She'll come," he said. "I told Beverly to kick her ass if she didn't."

"That sounds like a serious threat," Richie said.

They got out of the truck. Though the factory stood on a street lined with similar buildings, it was quiet, even for a Sunday. There was no one else around and none of the sounds of commerce—trucks backing up, men shouting—that Eddie associated with warehouse districts. Instead there was silence, a cool breeze off the river, and the cries of seabirds. Eddie drew his hood up, zipped his jacket, and shivered.

Richie zipped his flannel jacket closed. Silently, he offered Eddie a pair of his thick leather gloves.

Eddie was about to protest but Richie gave him a stern look. "Use them." He said.

Eddie slid them on and wiggled his fingers. They were so big for him that it was like wearing paws.

"Thank you," He glanced around. "Wait, where's Ben?"

Richie pointed. Ben was kneeling down by the waterline, a dark figure whose bright hair was the only spot of color against the blue-gray sky and brown river.

"You think he wants privacy?" Eddie asked.

"In this situation, privacy is a luxury none of us can afford. Come on." Jim strode off down the driveway, and they followed him. The factory itself backed up right onto the waterline, but there was a wide gravelly beach next to it. Shallow waves lapped at the weed-choked rocks. Logs had been placed in a rough square around a black pit where a fire had once burned. There were rusty cans and bottles strewn everywhere. Ben was standing by the edge of the water, his jacket off. As Eddie watched, he threw something small and white toward the water; it hit with a splash and vanished.

"What are you doing?" Eddie said.

Ben turned to face them, the wind whipping his brown hair across his face. "Sending a message."

Over his shoulder, Eddie thought he saw a shimmering tendril—like a living piece of seaweed—emerge from the gray river water, a bit of white caught in its grip. A moment later it vanished and he was left

blinking.

"A message to who?" Richie asked.

Ben scowled. "No one." He turned away from the water and stalked across the pebbled beach to where he'd spread his jacket out. There were three long blades laid out on it. As he turned, Eddie saw the sharpened metal disks threaded through his belt.

Ben stroked his fingers along the blades—they were flat and gray-white, waiting to be named. "I didn't have a chance to get to the armory, so these are the weapons we have. I thought we might as well get as ready as we can before Eleven gets here." He lifted the first blade. "Abrariel." The seraph knife shimmered and changed color as he named it. He held it out to Jim.

"I'm all right," Jim said, and drew his jacket aside to show the kindjal thrust through his belt. Ben handed Abrariel to Eddie, who took the weapon silently. It was warm in his hand, as if a secret life vibrated inside it.

"Camael," Ben said to the next blade, making it shudder and glow. "Telantes," he said to the third.

"Do you ever use Raziel's name?" Eddie asked as Ben slid the blades into his belt and shrugged his jacket back on, getting to his feet.

"Never," Richie said. "That's not done." His gaze scanned the road behind Eddie, looking for Eleven. Eddie could sense his anxiety, but before he could say anything else, his phone buzzed. He handed it wordlessly to Ben. He read the text message, his eyebrows lifting.

"It looks like the Inquisitor gave Pennywise until sunset to decide whether he wants me or the Mortal Instruments more," he said. "She and Sharon have been fighting for hours, so she hasn't noticed we're gone yet."

He handed Eddie back the phone and then turned to Jim and demanded, with surprising abruptness, "Did the Inquisitor's son die? Is that why she's like this?"

Jim sighed and thrust his hands into the pockets of his coat. "How

did you figure that out?"

"The way she reacts when someone says his name. It's the only time I've ever seen her show any human feelings."

Jim expelled a breath. He had pushed his glasses up and his eyes were squinted against the harsh wind off the river. "The Inquisitor is the way she is for many reasons. Will is only one of them."

"She doesn't seem like someone who even *likes* kids." Richie said.

"Not other people's," said Jim. "It was different with her own. Will was her golden boy. In fact, he was everyone's ... everyone who knew him. He was one of those people who was good at everything, unfailingly nice without being boring, handsome without everyone hating him. Well, maybe we hated him a little."

"He went to school with you?" Eddie said. "And my mother—and Pennywise? Is that how you knew him?"

"The Byers were in charge of running the London Institute, and Will went to school there. I saw him more after we all graduated, when he moved back to Alicante. And there was a time when I saw him very often indeed." Jim's eyes had gone distant, the same blue-gray as the river. "After he was married."

"So he was in the Circle?" Eddie asked.

"Not then," Jim said. "He joined the Circle after I—well, after what happened to me. Pennywise needed a new second in command and he wanted Will. Joyce, who was utterly loyal to the Clave, was hysterical—she begged Will to reconsider—but he cut her off. Wouldn't speak to her, or his father. He was absolutely in thrall to Pennywise. Went everywhere trailing after him like a shadow." Jim paused. "The thing is, Pennywise didn't think Will's wife was suitable for him. Not for someone who was going to be second in command of the Circle. She had—undesirable family connections."

The pain in Jim's voice surprised Eddie. Had he cared that much about these people?

Jim continued. "Pennywise forced Will to divorce Amatis and

remarry—his second wife was a very young girl, only eighteen years old, named Holly. She, too, was utterly under Pennywise's influence, did everything he told her to, no matter how bizarre. Then Will was killed in a Circle raid on a vampire nest. Holly killed herself when she found out. She was eight months pregnant at the time. And Will's father died, too, of heartbreak. So that was Joyce's whole family, all gone. They couldn't even bury her daughter-in-law and grandchild's ashes in the Bone City, because Holly was a suicide. She was buried at a crossroads outside Alicante. Joyce survived, but—she turned to ice. When the Inquisitor was killed in the Uprising, Joyce was offered his job. She returned from London to Derry—but never, as far as I heard, spoke about Will again. But it does explain why she hates Pennywise as much as she does.”

“Because my father poisons everything he touches?” Ben said bitterly.

“Because your father, for all his sins, still has a son, and she doesn't. And because she blames him for Will's death.”

“And she's right,” said Ben. “It was his fault.”

“Not entirely,” said Jim. “He offered Will a choice, and Will chose. Whatever else his faults were, Pennywise never blackmailed or threatened anyone into joining the Circle. He wanted only willing followers. The responsibility for Will's choices rests with him.”

“Free will,” said Richie.

“There's nothing free about it,” said Ben. “Pennywise—”

“Offered you a choice, didn't he?” Jim said. “When you went to see him. He wanted you to stay, didn't he? Stay and join up with him?”

“Yes.” Ben looked out across the water toward Governors Island. “He did.” Eddie could see the river reflected in his eyes; they looked steely, as if the gray water had drowned all their gold.

“And you said no,” said Jim.

Ben glared. “I wish people would stop guessing that.”

Richie turned to Jim “Will's wife,” he said in a quiet voice. “Was Holly

Wheeler?"

Jim looked confused but then nodded. "Yes, she was the sister of Will's *parabatai*, Mike. He died at the Uprising too."

Eddie frowned. "Why do you ask that, Richie?"

Richie looked down. "My mom's last name was Wheeler."

Jim seemed to realize something, as if the world was clearer now. "Your mother was Margaret Wheeler, and she married Wentworth Tozier..." He spoke almost to himself.

Ben looked at Richie. "So that means..."

"It means I have no family left," Richie spoke on such a broken tone Eddie just wanted to hug him and never let him go. But he didn't do it.

Jim turned away as if to avoid the conversation and paused. "Someone's coming."

Someone was indeed coming, someone very tall with black hair that blew in the wind. "Eleven," Eddie said. "But she looks ... different."

As she drew closer, he saw that her hair, normally spiked up and glittered like a disco ball, hung cleanly past her ears like a sheet of black silk. The rainbow leather pants had been replaced by a neat, old-fashioned dark suit and a black frock coat with glimmering silver buttons. Her cat's eyes glowed amber and green. "You look surprised to see me," she said.

Richie glanced at his watch. "We did wonder if you were coming." The broken tone was long gone.

"I said I would come, so I came. I just needed time to prepare. This isn't some hat trick, Shadowhunter. This is going to take some serious magic." She turned to Jim. "How's your arm?"

"Fine. Thank you." Jim was always polite.

"That's your truck parked up by the factory, isn't it?" Eleven pointed.

“It’s awfully butch for a bookseller.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Jim. “All that lugging around heavy book boxes, climbing stacks, hard-core alphabetizing...”

Eleven laughed. “Can you unlock the truck for me? I mean, I could do it myself”—she wiggled her fingers—“but that seems rude.”

“Sure.” Jim shrugged and they headed back toward the factory. When Eddie made as if to follow them, though, Ben caught his arm. “Wait. I want to talk to you for a second.”

Eddie frowned. “What is it?”

He dropped his hand. “I want you to put the Fearless rune on me. Before Jim gets back.”

“Why before he gets back?”

“Because he’s going to say it’s a bad idea. But it’s the only chance of defeating Agramon. Jim hasn’t—encountered it, he doesn’t know what it’s like. But I do.”

Eddie searched his face. “What was it like?”

His eyes were unreadable. “You see what you fear the most in the world.”

“I don’t even know what that is.”

“Trust me. You don’t want to.” He glanced down. “Do you have your stele?”

“Yeah, I have it.” Eddie pulled the woolly glove off his right hand and fished for the stele. His hand was shaking a little as he drew it out. “Where do you want the Mark?”

“The closer it is to the heart, the more effective.” He turned his back on Eddie’s hand and drew off his jacket, dropping it on the ground. He shrugged his T-shirt up, baring his back. “On the shoulder blade would be good.”

Eddie placed a hand on Ben's shoulder to steady himself. His skin there was a paler gold than the skin of his hands and face, and smooth where it was not scarred. Eddie traced the tip of the stele along the blade of his shoulder and felt him wince, his muscles tightening. "Don't press so hard—"

"Sorry." Eddie eased up, letting the rune flow from his mind, down through his arm, into the stele. The black line it left behind looked like charring, a line of ash. Eddie fixed his gaze on the thin star-shaped scar on Ben's shoulder. "What's this one from?"

Ben seemed to recognize what scar he was talking about. "I've always had it. Are you done?"

Eddie nodded, but realized Ben was turned around so he spoke. "It's done."

Ben turned around, shrugging his shirt back on. "Thanks." The sun was burning down beyond the horizon now, flooding the sky with blood and roses, turning the edge of the river to liquid gold, softening the ugliness of the urban waste all around them. "What about you?"

"What about me what?"

He took a step closer. "Push your sleeves up. I'll Mark you."

"Oh. Right." Eddie did as he asked, pushing up his sleeves, holding his bare arms out to him.

The sting of the stele on his skin was like the light touch of a needle's tip, scraping without puncturing. He watched the black lines appear with a sort of fascination. The Mark she'd gotten in his dream was still visible, faded only a little around the edges.

"What did you see?" Eddie asked.

Ben looked taken aback. "Huh?"

"The thing you fear the most. What did you see?"

It seemed like Ben didn't want to answer, but after a few seconds he did. "Something I hope I'll never see again."

“And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a Mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.”

Eddie turned around, pulling his sleeves down. Eleven stood watching them, her black coat seeming to float around her in the wind off the river.

“You can quote the Bible?” asked Ben, bending to retrieve his jacket.

“I was born in a deeply religious century, my boy,” said Eleven. “I always thought Cain’s might have been the first recorded Mark. It certainly protected him.”

“But he was hardly one of the angels,” said Eddie. “Didn’t he kill his brother?”

“Aren’t we planning to kill our father?” said Ben.

“That’s different,” said Eddie, but didn’t get a chance to elaborate on *how* it was different, because at that moment, Jim’s truck pulled up onto the beach, spraying gravel from its tires. Jim leaned out the window. “Okay,” he said to Eleven. “Here we go. Get in.”

“Are we going to drive to the boat?” Eddie said, bewildered. “I thought...”

“What boat?” Eleven cackled, as she swung herself up into the cab next to Jim. She jerked a thumb behind her. “You two, get into the back.”

Eddie saw Richie on the backseat, looking at the window. Ben climbed up into the back of the truck and leaned down to help Eddie up after him. As he settled herself against the spare tire, Eddie saw that a black pentagram inside a circle had been painted onto the metal floor of the truck bed. The arms of the pentagram were decorated with wildly curlicuing symbols. They weren’t quite the runes he was familiar with—there was something about looking at them that was like trying to understand a person speaking a language that was close to, but not quite, English.

Jim leaned out the window and looked back at them. “You know I

don't like this," he said, the wind muffling his voice. "Eddie, you're going to stay in the truck with Eleven. The rest of us will go up onto the ship. You understand?"

Eddie nodded and huddled into a corner of the truck bed. Richie, who was beside him, was bracing his feet. "This is going to be interesting."

"What—" Eddie began, but the truck started up again, tires roaring against gravel, drowning his words. It lurched forward into the shallow water at the edge of the river. Eddie was flung against the cab's back window as the truck moved forward into the river—was Jim planning to drown them all? He twisted around and saw that the cab was full of dizzying blue columns of light, snaking and twisting. The truck seemed to bump over something bulky, as if it had driven over a log. Then they were moving smoothly forward, almost gliding.

Eddie hauled himself to his knees and looked over the side of the truck, already fairly sure what he would see. They were moving—no, *driving* —atop the dark water, the bottom of the truck's tires just brushing the river's surface, spreading tiny ripples outward along with the occasional shower of Eleven-created blue sparks. Everything was suddenly very quiet, except for the faint roar of the motor and the call of the seabirds overhead. Eddie stared across the truck bed at Ben, who was grinning. "Now this is *really* going to impress Pennywise."

"I don't know," Eddie said. "Other crack teams get bat boomerangs and wall-crawling powers; we get the Aquatruck."

23. Time Is on My Side

Bill pushed down on the handle of the library door. His mother and the Inquisitor stood at opposite ends of the huge desk, like boxers facing each other across a ring. Sharon's cheeks were bright red, her hair straggling around her face. Bill gulped. His mom looked angry, maybe this wasn't a good idea.

On the other hand, if Sharon looked angry, the Inquisitor looked positively demented. She whirled around as the library door opened, her mouth twisted into an ugly shape. "What are you doing here?" She shouted.

"Joyce," said Sharon.

"Sharon!" The Inquisitor's voice rose. "I've had about enough of you and your delinquent children—"

"Joyce," Sharon said again. There was something in her voice—an urgency—that made even the Inquisitor turn and look.

The air just by the freestanding brass globe was shimmering like water. A shape began to coalesce out of it, like black paint being stroked over white canvas, evolving into the figure of a man with broad, planklike shoulders. The image was wavering, too much for Bill to see more than that the man was tall, with a shock of close-cropped salt-white hair.

"Pennywise." The Inquisitor looked caught off guard, Bill thought, though surely she must have been expecting him.

The air by the globe was shimmering more violently now. Bill gasped as a man stepped out of the wavering air, as if he were coming up through layers of water. Ben's father was a formidable man, over six feet tall with a wide chest and hard, thick arms corded with ropy muscles. His face was almost triangular, sharpening to a hard, pointed chin. He might have been considered handsome, Bill thought, but he was startlingly unlike Ben, lacking anything of his son's pale-gold looks. The hilt of a sword was visible just over his left shoulder—the Mortal Sword. It wasn't as if he needed to be armed, since he

wasn't corporeally present, so he must have worn it to annoy the Inquisitor. Not that she needed to be more annoyed than she was.

"Joyce," Pennywise said, his dark eyes grazing the Inquisitor with a look of satisfied amusement. "And Sharon, my Sharon—it *has* been a long time."

Sharon, swallowing hard, said with some difficulty, "I'm not your Sharon, Robert."

"And this must be your son," Pennywise went on as if she hadn't spoken. His eyes came to rest on Bill. A faint shiver went through him, as if something had plucked at his nerves. Ben's father's words were perfectly ordinary, even polite, but there was something in his blank and predatory gaze that made Bill want to step in front of his mother and block her from Pennywise's view. "He looks just like you."

"Leave my children out of this, Pennywise," Sharon said, clearly struggling to keep her voice steady.

"Well, that hardly seems fair," Pennywise said, "considering you haven't left *my* child out of this." He turned to the Inquisitor. "I got your message. Surely that's not the best you can do?"

She hadn't moved; now she blinked slowly, like a lizard. "I hope the terms of my offer were perfectly clear."

"My son in return for the Mortal Instruments. That was it, correct? Otherwise you'll kill him."

"Kill him?" Bill echoed. "MOM!"

"Bill," Sharon said tightly. "Shut up."

The Inquisitor shot Bill a venomous glare between her slitted eyelids. "You have the terms correct, Gray."

"Then my answer is no."

"No?" The Inquisitor looked as if she'd taken a step forward on solid ground and it had collapsed under her feet. "You can't bluff me,

Pennywise. I will do exactly as I threatened.”

“Oh, I have no doubt in you, Joyce. You have always been a woman of single-minded and ruthless focus. I recognize these qualities in you because I possess them myself.”

“I am nothing like you. I follow the Law—”

“Even when it instructs you to kill a boy still in his teens just to punish his father? This is not about the Law, Joyce, it is that you hate and blame me for the death of your son and this is your manner of recompensing me. It will make no difference. I will not give up the Mortal Instruments, not even for Jonathan.”

The Inquisitor simply stared at him. “But he’s your son,” she said. “Your *child*.”

“Children make their own choices,” said Pennywise. “That’s something you never understood. I offered Jonathan safety if he stayed with me; he spurned it and returned to you, and you’ll exact your revenge on him as I told him you would. You are nothing, Joyce,” he finished, “if not predictable.”

The Inquisitor didn’t seem to notice the insult. “The Clave will insist on his death, should you not give me the Mortal Instruments,” she said, like someone caught in a bad dream. “I won’t be able to stop them.”

“I’m aware of that,” said Pennywise. “But there is nothing I can do. I offered him a chance. He didn’t take it.”

“You ... offered him...” The Inquisitor was starting to remind Bill of a robot whose circuits were shorting out. “And he turned you *down*?” She shook her head. “But he’s your spy—your weapon—”

“Is that what you thought?” he said, with apparently genuine surprise. “I am hardly interested in spying out the secrets of the Clave. I’m only interested in its destruction, and to achieve that end I have far more powerful weapons in my arsenal than a boy.”

“But—”

"Believe what you like," Pennywise said with a shrug. "You are nothing, Joyce Byers. The figurehead of a regime whose power is soon to be shattered, its rule ended. There is nothing you have to offer me that I could possibly want."

"Robert!" The Inquisitor threw herself forward, as if she could stop him, catch at him, but her hands only went through him as if through water. With a look of supreme disgust, he stepped back and vanished.

The sky was licked with the last tongues of a fading fire, the water had turned to iron. Eddie drew his jacket closer around his body and shivered.

"Are you cold?" Richie had been standing at the back of the truck bed, looking down at the wake the car left behind it: two white lines of foam cutting the water. Now he came and slid down beside Eddie, his back against the rear window of the cab. The window itself was almost entirely fogged up with bluish smoke.

"Aren't you?"

"No." He shook his head and slid his jacket off, handing it across to Eddie. He put it on, reveling in the softness of the leather. It was too big in that comforting way. "You're going to stay in the truck like Jim told you to, right?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Not in the literal sense, no."

Eddie nodded slowly. "Why are you doing this? Pennywise is not after you."

Richie frowned and looked away. "My entire family died because of him. It's my duty to stop him."

Eddie slid his glove off and reached out his hand to Richie. He took it, gripping it tightly. Eddie looked down at their interlaced fingers, his own so small, squared-off at the tips, Richie's were long and thin. "You'll find Stan for me," he said. "I know you will."

"Eds." Eddie could see the water all around them mirrored in his eyes. "He may be—I mean, it may be—"

"No." His tone left no room for doubt. "He'll be all right. He has to be."

Richie exhaled. His irises rippled with dark blue water—like tears, Eddie thought, but they weren't tears, only reflections. "There's something I want to ask you," he said. His hand moved to cup Eddie's cheek, his palm warm against his cold skin, and Eddie found that his own fear was gone.

Eddie's chin went up, his lips parting in expectation—Richie's mouth brushed his lightly, so lightly it felt like the brush of a feather, the memory of a kiss—

"Guys!" Ben's voice echoed in the truck.

Richie let go of him with an exclamation and scrambled to his feet. Eddie got up awkwardly, Richie's heavy jacket throwing his off balance. Blue sparks were flying from the windows of the cab, and in their light he could see that the side of the ship was corrugated black metal, that there was a thin ladder crawling down one side, and that an iron railing ran around the top. What looked like big, awkwardly shaped birds were perched on the railing. Waves of cold seemed to roll off the boat like freezing air off an iceberg. When Ben called out to him, his breath came out in white puffs, his words lost in the sudden engine roar of the big ship. "They're coming."

"Who's coming?"

"The demons." He pointed up. At first Eddie saw nothing. Then he noticed the huge, awkward birds he'd seen before. They were dropping off the railing one by one, falling like stones down the side of the boat—then leveling out and heading straight for the truck where it floated on top of the waves. As they got closer, he saw that they weren't birds at all, but ugly flying things like pterodactyls, with wide, leathery wings and bony triangular heads. Their mouths were full of serrated shark teeth, row on row of them, and their claws glinted like straight razors.

Richie scrambled up onto the roof of the cab, Telantes blazing in his hand. As the first of the flying things reached them, he flung the blade. It struck the demon, slicing off the top of its skull the way you might slice the top off an egg. With a high windy screech, the thing toppled sideways, wings spasming. When it struck the ocean, the water boiled.

The second demon hit the hood of the truck, its claws raking long furrows in the metal. It flung itself against the windshield, spiderwebbing the glass. Eddie shouted for Jim, but another one of them dive-bombed him, hurtling down from the steel sky like an arrow. He yanked the sleeve of Richie's jacket up, flinging his arm out to show the defensive rune. The demon skreeked as the other one had, wings flapping backward—but it had already come too close, within his reach. Eddie saw that it had no eyes, only indentations on each side of its skull, as he smashed Abrariel into its chest. It burst apart, leaving a wisp of black smoke behind.

“Well done,” said Richie. He had jumped down from the truck cab to dispatch another one of the screeching flying things. He had a dagger out now, its hilt slicked with black blood.

“What *are* these things?” Eddie panted, swinging Abrariel in a wide arc that slashed across the chest of a flying demon. It cawed and swiped at him with a wing. This close, he could see that the wings ended in blade-sharp ridges of bone. This one caught the sleeve of Richie's jacket and tore it across.

“My *jacket*,” said Richie in a rage, and stabbed down at the thing as it rose, piercing its back. It shrieked and disappeared. “I *loved* that jacket.”

Eddie stared at him, then spun around as the rending screech of metal assailed his ears. Two of the flying demons had their claws in the top of the truck cab, ripping it off the frame. The air was filled with the screech of tearing metal. Jim was down on the hood of the truck, slashing at the creatures with his *kindjal*. One toppled off the side of the truck, vanishing before it hit the water. The other burst into the air, the cab roof clutched in its claws, *skreeking* triumphantly, and winged back toward the boat.

For the moment the sky was clear. Eddie raced up and peered down into the cab. Eleven was slumped down in her seat, her face gray. It was too dark for her to see if she was wounded. "Eleven!" he shouted. "Are you hurt?"

"No." She struggled to sit upright, then fell back against the seat. "I'm just—drained. The protection spells on the ship are strong. Stripping them, keeping them off, is—difficult." Her voice faded. "But if I don't do it, anyone who sets foot on that ship, other than Pennywise, will die."

"Maybe you should come with us," said Ben.

"I can't work on the wards if I'm on the ship itself. I have to do it from here. That's the way it works." Eleven's grin looked painful. "Besides, I'm no good in a fight. My talents lie elsewhere."

Eddie, still hanging down into the cab, began, "But what if we need —"

"*Eddie!*" Jim shouted, but it was too late. None of them had seen the flying creature clinging motionless to the side of the truck. It launched itself upward now, winging sideways, claws sinking deep into the back of Eddie's jacket, a blur of shadowy wings and reeking, jagged teeth. With a howling screech of triumph, it took off into the air, Eddie dangling helplessly from its claws.

"Eddie!" Jim shouted again, and raced to the edge of the truck's hood and stopped there, staring hopelessly upward at the dwindling winged shape with its slackly hanging burden.

"It won't kill him," said Ben, joining him on the hood. "It's retrieving him for Pennywise."

There was something about his tone that sent a chill through Jim's blood. He turned to stare at the boy next to him. "But—"

He didn't finish. Ben and Richie had already dived from the truck, in a single smooth movement. They splashed down in the filthy river water and struck out toward the boat, their strong kicks churning the

water to froth.

Jim turned back to Jane, whose pale face was just visible through the cracked windshield, a white smudge against the darkness. Jim held a hand up, thought he saw Jane nod in response.

Sheathing his *kindjal* at his side, he dived into the river after them.

Bill stood beside his mother as the Inquisitor stood, swaying slightly, her face a chalky gray-white.

“Joyce,” Sharon said. There was no feeling in her voice, not even any anger.

The Inquisitor didn’t seem to hear her. Her expression didn’t change as she sank bonelessly into Keene’s old chair. “My God,” she said, staring down at the desk. “What have I done?”

Sharon crossed the room to the Inquisitor and looked down at her. “What have you done, Joyce?” she said. “You’ve handed victory to Pennywise. That’s what you’ve done.”

“No,” the Inquisitor breathed.

“You knew exactly what Pennywise was planning when you locked Ben up. You refused to allow the Clave to become involved because it would have interfered with your plan. You wanted to make Pennywise suffer as he had made you suffer; to show him you had the power to kill his son the way he killed yours. You wanted to humble him.”

“Yes...”

“But Pennywise will not be humbled,” said Sharon. “I could have told you that. You never had a hold over him. He only pretended to consider your offer to make absolutely certain that we would have no time to call for reinforcements from Idris. And now it’s too late.”

The Inquisitor looked up wildly. Her hair had come loose from its knot and hung in lank strips around her face. It was the most human

Bill had seen her look, but he got no pleasure out of it. His mother's words chilled him: *too late*. "No, Sharon," she said. "We can still—"

"Still *what*?" Sharon's voice cracked. "Call on the Clave? We don't have the days, the hours, it would take them to get here. If we're going to face Pennywise—and God knows we have no choice—"

"We're going to have to do it now," interrupted a deep voice. Behind Bill, glowering darkly, was Zack Denbrough.

Bill stared at his father. It had been years since he'd seen him in hunting gear; his time had been taken up with administrative tasks, with running the Conclave and dealing with Downworlder issues. Something about seeing his father in his heavy, dark armored clothes, his broadsword strapped across his back, reminded Bill of being a child again, when his father had been the biggest, strongest and most terrifying man he could imagine. And he was still terrifying. He hadn't seen his father since he'd embarrassed himself at Jim's. He tried to catch his eye now, but Zack was looking at Sharon. "The Conclave stands ready," Zack said. "The boats are waiting at the dock."

The Inquisitor's hands fluttered around her face. "It's no good," she said. "There aren't enough of us—we can't possibly—"

Zack ignored her. Instead, he looked at Sharon. "We should go very soon," he said, and in his tone there was the respect that had been lacking when he had addressed the Inquisitor.

"But the Clave," the Inquisitor began. "They should be informed."

Sharon shoved the phone on the desk toward the Inquisitor, hard. "*You* tell them. Tell them what you've done. It's your job, after all."

The Inquisitor said nothing, just stared at the phone, one hand over her mouth.

Bill headed toward the door, but was stopped by a hand on his shoulder. He looked up in surprise. It was his father. He was looking down at Bill, and though he wasn't smiling, there was a look of pride on his lined and tired face.

“If you’re in need of a blade, William, my guisarme is in the entryway. If you’d like to use it.”

Joyce looked up at Sharon with the blank, shattered eyes of a ruined statue. “Are you going to kill me, Sharon?”

Sharon hissed through her teeth. “Not even close,” she said. “We need every Shadowhunter in the city, and right now, that includes you. Get up, Joyce, and get yourself ready for battle. From now on, the orders around here are going to come from me .” She smiled grimly. “And the first thing you’re going to do is free my son from that accursed Malachi Configuration.”

She looked magnificent as she spoke, Bill thought with pride, a true Shadowhunter warrior, every line of her blazing with righteous fury.

He hated to spoil the moment—but they were going to find out Ben was gone on their own soon enough. Better that someone cushioned the shock. He cleared his throat. “A-actually,” he said, “there’s something you should p-probably know...”

Eddie had always hated roller coasters, hated that feeling of his stomach dropping out through his feet when the coaster hurtled downward. Being snatched from the truck and dragged through the air like a mouse in the claws of an eagle was ten times worse. He screamed out loud as his feet left the truck bed and her body soared upward, unbelievably fast. He screamed and twisted—until he looked down and saw how high he already was above the water and realized what would happen if the flying demon released him.

He went still. The pickup truck looked like a toy below, drifting impossibly on the waves. The city swung around him, blurred walls of glittering light. It might have been beautiful if he weren’t so terrified. The demon banked and dived, and suddenly instead of rising he was falling. He thought of the thing dropping him hundreds of feet through the air until he crashed into the icy black water, and shut his eyes—but falling through blind darkness was worse. He opened them again and saw the black deck of the ship rising up from below him like a hand about to swat them both out of the sky. He

screamed a second time as they dropped toward the deck—and through a dark square cut into its surface. Now they were inside the ship.

The flying creature slowed its pace. They were dropping through the center of the boat, surrounded by railed metal decks. Eddie caught glimpses of dark machinery; none of it looked in working order, and there were gears and tools abandoned in various places. If there had been electrical lights before, they were no longer working, though a faint glow permeated everything. Whatever had powered the ship before, Pennywise was now powering it with something else.

Something that had sucked the warmth right out of the atmosphere. Icy air lashed at him face as the demon reached the bottom of the ship and ducked down a long, poorly lit corridor. It wasn't being particularly careful with him. His knee slammed against a pipe as the creature turned a corner, sending a shock wave of pain up his leg. He cried out and heard its hissing laughter above him.

Then it released him and he was falling. Twisting in the air, Eddie tried to get his hands and knees under him before he hit the ground. It almost worked. He struck the floor with a jarring impact and rolled to the side, stunned.

He was lying on a hard metal surface, in semidarkness. This had probably been a storage space at one point, because the walls were smooth and doorless. There was a square opening high above him through which the only light filtered. His whole body felt like one big bruise.

"Eddie?" A whispered voice. Eddie rolled onto his side, wincing. A shadow knelt beside him. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw the small, muscular figure, dark skin, dark brown eyes. *Mike*. "Eddie, is that you?"

Eddie sat up, ignoring the screaming pain in his back. "Mike. Mike, oh my God." He stared at the other boy, then wildly around the room. It was empty but for the two of them. "Mike, where is he? Where's Stan?"

Mike bit his lip. His wrists were bloody, Eddie saw, his face streaked

with dried tears. "Eddie, I'm so sorry," he said, in his soft and husky voice. "Stan's dead."

Notes for the Chapter:

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24. My Beloved is Mine

Soaked through and half-frozen, Ben collapsed onto the deck of the ship, water streaming from his hair and clothes. He stared up at the cloudy night sky, gasping in breaths. It had been no easy task to climb the rickety iron ladder badly bolted to the ship's metal side, especially with slippery hands and drenched clothes dragging him down.

If it hadn't been for the Fearless rune, he reflected, he probably would have been worried that one of the flying demons would pick him off the ladder like a bird picking a bug off a vine. Fortunately, they seemed to have returned to the ship once they'd seized Eddie. Ben couldn't imagine why, but he'd long ago given up trying to fathom why his father did anything.

Above him a head appeared, silhouetted against the sky. It was Richie, having reached the top of the ladder. He clambered laboriously onto the railing and dropped down onto the other side of it. He looked down at Ben. "You all right?"

"Fine." Ben got to his feet. He was shivering. It was cold on the boat, colder than it had been down by the water—and his jacket was gone. He'd given it to Eddie. "Where's Jim?"

"I'm here!" They both heard Jim's voice, he was on top on the ladder too. He approached them.

Ben looked around. "Somewhere there's a door that leads into the ship. I found it last time. We just have to walk around the deck until we find it again."

Jim started forward.

"And let me go first," Ben added, stepping in front of him. Jim shot him an extremely puzzled look, seemed as if he were about to say something, and finally fell into step just beside Ben as they approached the curved front of the ship, where Ben had stood with Pennywise the night before. He could hear the oily slap of water against the bow, far below.

“Your father,” Jim said, “what did he say to you when you saw him? What did he promise you?”

“Oh, you know. The usual. A lifetime’s supply of Knicks tickets.” Ben spoke lightly but the memory bit into him deeper than the cold. “He said he’d make sure no harm came to me or anyone I cared about if I’d leave the Clave and return to Derry with him.”

“Do you think—” Jim hesitated. “Do you think he’d hurt Eddie to get back at you?”

They rounded the bow and Ben caught a brief glimpse of the Statue of Liberty off in the distance, a pillar of glowing light. “No. I think he took him to make us come onto the boat like this, to give him a bargaining chip. That’s all.”

“I’m not sure he needs a bargaining chip.” Richie spoke in a low voice as Jim unsheathed his kindjal. Ben turned to follow Richie’s gaze, and for a moment could only stare.

There was a black hole in the deck on the west side of the ship, a hole like a square that had been cut into the metal, and out of its depths poured a dark cloud of monsters. Ben flashed back to the last time he had stood here, with the Mortal Sword in his hand, staring around him in horror as the sky above him and the sea below him turned to roiling masses of nightmares. Only now they stood in front of him, a cacophony of demons: the bone-white Raum, Oni demons with their green bodies, wide mouths, and horns; the slinking black Kuri demons, spider demons with their eight pincer-tipped arms and the poison-dripping fangs that protruded from their eye sockets—

Ben couldn’t count them all. He felt for Camael and took it from his belt, its white glare lighting the deck. The demons hissed at the sight of it, but none of them backed away. The Fearless rune on Ben’s shoulder blade began to burn. He wondered how many demons he could kill before it burned itself away.

“Stop! Stop!” Richie’s hand, knotted in the back of Ben’s shirt, jerked him backward. “There’s too many. If we can get back to the ladder —”

"We can't." Ben yanked himself out of Jim's grip and pointed. "They've cut us off on both sides."

It was true. A phalanx of Moloch demons, flames jetting from their empty eyes, blocked their retreat. Jim swore, fluently and viciously. "Jump over the side, then. I'll hold them off."

"You jump," Ben said. "I'm fine here."

Jim threw his head back. His ears had gone pointed, and when he snarled at Ben, his lips drew back over canines that were suddenly sharp. "You—" He broke off as a Moloch demon leaped at him, claws outstretched. Ben stabbed it casually in the spine as it went by, and it staggered into Jim, yowling. Jim seized it in clawed hands and hurled it over the railing.

"You used that Fearless rune, didn't you?" Richie said, turning back to Ben with concerned eyes.

There was a distant splash.

"You're not wrong," Ben admitted.

"Christ," said Jim. "Did you put it on yourself?"

"No. Eddie put it on me." Ben's seraph blade cut the air with white fire; two Drevak demons fell. There were dozens more where it had come from, lurching toward them, their needle-tipped hands outstretched. "He's good at that, you know."

"Teenagers," said Jim, as if it were the filthiest word he knew, and threw himself into the oncoming horde.

"Dead?" Eddie stared at Mike as if he'd spoken in Bulgarian. "He can't be dead."

Mike said nothing, just watched him with sad, dark eyes.

"I would know." Eddie sat up and pressed his hand, clenched into a fist, against his chest. "I would know it *here*."

"I thought that myself," Mike said. "But you don't know. You never know."

Eddie scrambled to his feet. Richie's jacket hung off his shoulders, the back of it nearly shredded through. He shrugged it off impatiently and dropped it onto the floor. It was ruined, the back scored through with a dozen razored claw marks. *Richie will be upset that I wrecked his jacket*, he thought. *I should buy him a new one. I should—*

He drew a long, ragged breath. He could hear his own heart pounding, but that sounded distant too. "What—happened to him?"

Mike was still kneeling on the floor. "Pennywise got us both," he said. "He chained us up in a room together. Then he came in with a weapon—a sword, really long and bright, as if it was glowing. He threw silver powder at me so I couldn't fight him, and he—he stabbed Stan in the throat." His voice faded to a whisper. "He cut his wrists open and he poured the blood into bowls. Some of those demon creatures of his came in and helped him take it. Then he just left Stan lying there, like some toy he'd ripped all the insides out of so he had no use for it anymore. I screamed—but I knew he was dead. Then one of the demons picked me up and brought me down here."

Eddie pressed the back of his hand against his mouth, pressed and pressed until he tasted salty blood. The sharp taste of the blood seemed to cut through the fog in his brain. "We have to get out of here."

"No offense, but that's pretty obvious." Mike got to his feet, wincing. "There's no way out of here. Not even for a Shadowhunter. Maybe if you were..."

"If I were what?" Eddie demanded, pacing the square of their cell. "Ben? Well, I'm not." He kicked at the wall. It echoed hollowly. He dug into his pocket and pulled out his stele. "But I have my own talents."

He shoved the tip of the stele against the wall and began to draw. The lines seemed to flow out of him, black and charred-looking, hot as her furious anger. He slammed the stele against the wall again and

again and the black lines flowed up out of its tip like flames. When he drew back, breathing hard, he saw Mike staring at him in astonishment.

“Man,” he said, “what did you *do*?”

Eddie wasn't sure. It looked as if he had thrown a bucket of acid against the wall. The metal all around the rune was sagging and dripping like ice cream on a hot day. He stepped back, eyeing it warily as a hole the size of a large dog opened in the wall. Eddie could see steel struts behind it, more of the ship's metal innards. The edges of the hole still sizzled, though it had stopped spreading outward. Mike took a step forward, pushing Eddie's arm away.

“Wait.” Eddie was suddenly nervous. “The melted metal—it could be, like, toxic sludge or something.”

Mike snorted. “I'm from New Jersey. I was born in toxic sludge.” He marched up to the hole and peered through it. “There's a metal catwalk on the other side,” he announced. “Here—I'm going to pull myself through.” He turned around and stuck his feet through the hole, then his legs, moving backward slowly. He grimaced as he wriggled his body through, then froze. “Ouch! My shoulders are stuck. Push me?” He held his hands out.

Eddie took his hands and pushed. Mike's face turned white, then red—and he suddenly pulled free, like a champagne cork popped from the bottle. With a shriek, he tumbled backward. There was a crash and Eddie stuck his head anxiously through the hole. “Are you all right?”

Mike was lying on a narrow metal catwalk several feet below. He rolled over slowly and pushed himself into a sitting position, wincing. “My ankle—but I'll be fine,” he added, seeing Eddie's face. “We heal fast too, you know.”

“I know. Okay, my turn.” Eddie's stele poked uncomfortably into his stomach as he bent, prepared to slide through the hole after Mike. The drop to the catwalk was intimidating, but not as intimidating as the idea of waiting in the storage space for whatever came to claim them. He turned over onto his stomach, sliding his feet into the hole

And something seized him by the back of his shirt, hauling him upward. His stele fell out of his belt and rattled to the floor. He gasped in sudden shock and pain; the neck band of his sweater cut into his throat, and he choked. A moment later he was released. He crashed to the floor, his knees hitting the metal with a hollow clang. Gagging, he rolled onto his back and looked up, knowing what he would see.

Pennywise stood over him. In one hand he held a seraph blade, glittering with a harsh white light. His other hand, which had gripped the back of Eddie's shirt, was clenched into a fist. His carved white face was set into a sneer of disdain. "Always your mother's son, Edward," he said. "What have you done now?"

Eddie pulled himself painfully up to his knees. His mouth was filled with the salty blood from where his lip had torn open. As he looked at Pennywise, his simmering rage bloomed like a poisonous flower inside his chest. This man, his father, had killed Stan and left him dead on the floor like so much discarded trash. He had thought he had hated people before in his life; he'd been wrong. *This* was hatred.

"The werewolf boy," Pennywise went on, frowning, "where is he?"

Eddie leaned forward and spat his mouthful of blood onto his shoes. With a sharp exclamation of disgust and surprise, Pennywise stepped backward, raising the blade in his hand, and for a moment Eddie saw the unguarded fury in his eyes and thought he was really going to do it, was really going to kill him right there where he crouched at his feet, for spitting on his shoes.

Slowly, he lowered the blade. Without a word, he walked past Eddie, and stared through the hole he had made in the wall. Slowly, Eddie turned, his eyes raking the floor until he saw it. His mother's stele. He reached for it, his breath catching—

Pennywise, turning, saw what he was doing. With a single stride, he was across the room. He kicked the stele out of Eddie's reach; it spun across the metal floor and fell through the hole in the wall. Eddie half-closed his eyes, feeling the loss of the stele like the loss of his

mother all over again. “The demons will find your Downworlder friend,” said Pennywise, in his cold, still voice, sliding his seraph blade into a sheath at his waist. “There is nowhere for him to flee to. Nowhere for any of you to go. Now get up, Edward.”

Slowly, Eddie got to his feet. His whole body ached from the pummeling it had taken. A moment later he gasped in surprise as Pennywise seized him by the shoulders, turning him so that his back was to him. He whistled; a high, sharp, and unpleasant sound. The air stirred overhead and he heard the ugly flap of leathery wings. With a little cry, he tried to break away, but Pennywise was too strong. The wings settled around them both and then they were rising into the air together, Pennywise holding him in his arms, as if he really were his father.

Ben had thought he and Richie and Jim would be dead by now. He wasn't sure why they weren't. The deck of the ship was slippery with blood. He was covered in filth. Even his hair was lank and sticky with ichor, and his eyes stung with blood and sweat. There was a deep cut along the top of his right arm, and no time to carve a healing rune into the skin. Every time he lifted the arm, a searing pain shot through his side.

They had managed to wedge themselves into a recess in the metal wall of the ship, and they fought from this shelter as the demons lurched at them. Ben had used both his *chakrams* and was down to his last seraph blade and the dagger he'd taken from Richie. It wasn't much—he wouldn't have gone out to face only a few demons this poorly armed, and now he was facing a horde. He ought to be frightened, he knew, but he felt almost nothing at all—only a disgust for the demons, who did not belong in this world, and rage at Pennywise, who had summoned them here. Distantly, he knew his lack of fear wasn't entirely a good thing. He wasn't even afraid of how much blood he was losing from his arm.

A spider demon scuttled toward Richie, chittering and jetting yellow poison. He ducked away, not quite fast enough to keep a few drops of the poison from splattering his shirt. It hissed as it ate through the material; he felt the sting as it burned his skin like a dozen tiny

superheated needles. The spider demon clicked in satisfaction, and sprayed another jet of poison.

Richie ducked and the venom hit an Oni demon coming toward him from the side; the Oni screamed in agony and thrashed its way to the spider demon, claws extended. The two grappled together, rolling across the deck.

The surrounding demons surged away from the spilled poison, which made a barrier between them and the Shadowhunter. Ben took advantage of the momentary breather to turn to Jim beside him. Jim was almost unrecognizable. His ears rose to sharp, wolfish points; his lips were pulled back from his snarling muzzle in a permanent rictus, his clawed hands black with demon ichor.

"We should go for the railings." Jim's voice was half a growl. "Get off the ship. We can't kill them all. Maybe Eleven—"

"I don't think we're doing so badly." Ben twirled his seraph blade—which was a bad idea; his hand was wet with blood and the blade almost slipped out of his grasp. "All things considered."

Jim made a noise that might have been a snarl or a laugh, or a combination of both. Then something huge and shapeless fell out of the sky, knocking them both to the ground.

Ben hit the ground hard, his seraph blade flying out of his hand. It struck the deck, skittered across the metal surface, and slid over the edge of the boat, out of sight. Ben swore and staggered to his feet. The thing that had landed on them was an Oni demon.

It was unusually big for its kind—not to mention unusually smart to have thought of climbing up onto the roof and dropping down on them from above. It was sitting on top of Jim now, slashing at him with the sharp tusks that sprouted from its forehead. Jim was defending himself as best he could with his own claws, but he was already drenched in blood; his *kindjal* lay a foot away from him on the deck. Jim grabbed for it and the Oni seized one of his legs in a spadelike hand, bringing the leg down like a tree branch over its knee. Ben heard the bone break with a snap as Jim cried out.

Ben dived for the *kindjal* , grabbed it, and rolled to his feet, flinging the dagger hard at the back of the Oni demon's neck. It sliced through with enough force to decapitate the creature, which sagged forward, black blood gushing from its neck stump. A moment later it was gone. The *kindjal* thumped to the deck beside Jim.

"Hey!" Richie approached to Jim. "Your arm—"

"It's broken." Jim struggled into a sitting position. His face twisted in pain.

"But you heal fast."

Jim looked around, his face grim. The Oni might have been dead, but the other demons had learned from its example. They were swarming up onto the roof. Ben couldn't tell, in the dim moonlight, how many of them there were—dozens? Hundreds?

After a certain number it didn't matter anymore. Jim closed his hand around the hilt of the *kindjal* . "Not fast enough."

Ben drew the dagger from his belt. It was the last of his weapons and it seemed suddenly and pitifully small. A sharp emotion pierced him—not fear, he was still beyond that, but sorrow. He saw Richie and Bill, as if they were smoke, with their arms out as if they were welcoming him home, then Eddie, smiling him with compassion, Stan and Beverly at his side, like the they always were.

He rose to his feet just as they fell from the roof in a wave, a shadow tide blotting out the moon. Ben moved to try to block Jim, but it was no use; the demons were all around. One reared up in front of him. It was a six-foot skeleton, grinning with broken teeth. Scraps of brightly colored Tibetan prayer flags hung from its rotting bones. It gripped a *katana* sword in a bony hand, which was unusual—most demons didn't arm themselves. The blade, inscribed with demonic runes, was longer than Ben's arm, curling and sharp and deadly.

Ben flung the dagger. It struck the demon's bony rib cage and stuck there. The demon barely seemed to notice; it only kept moving, inexorable as death. The air around it stank of death and graveyards. It raised the *katana* in a clawed hand— A gray shadow cut the

darkness in front of Ben, a shadow that moved with a whirling, precise, and deadly motion.

The downward swing of the *katana* met with the grinding screech of metal on metal; the shadowy figure thrust the *katana* back at the demon, stabbing upward with the other hand with a swiftness that Ben's eye could barely follow. The demon fell back, its skull shattering as it crumpled into nothingness. All around him he could hear the shrieks of demons howling in pain and surprise. Whirling, he saw that dozens of shapes— human shapes—were crawling up over the railings, dropping to the ground, and racing to close with the mass of demons that crawled, slithered, hissed, and flew upon the deck. They carried blades of light and wore the dark, tough clothing of—

“*Shadowhunters*?” Ben said, so startled that he spoke out loud.

“Who else?” A grin flashed in the darkness.

“Malik? Is that you?”

Malik inclined his head. “Sorry about earlier today,” he said. “I was under orders.”

Ben was about to tell Malik that his having just saved his life more than made up for his earlier attempt to prevent Ben from leaving the Institute, when a group of Raum demons surged toward them, tentacles lashing the air. Malik whirled and charged to meet them with a shout, his seraph blade blazing like a star. Ben was about to follow him when a hand seized him by the arm and pulled him sideways.

It was a Shadowhunter, all in black, a hood shading the face beneath. “Come with me.”

The hand tugged insistently at his sleeve. “I need to get to Jim. He's been hurt.” He jerked his arm back. “Let go of me.”

“Oh, for the Angel's sake—” The figure released him and reached up to push back the hood of its long cloak, revealing a narrow white face and gray eyes that blazed like chips of diamond. “ Now will you do

what you're told, Jonathan?"

It was the Inquisitor.

Despite the whirling speed with which they flew through the air, Eddie would have kicked out at Pennywise if he could. But he held him as if his arms were iron bands. Eddie's feet swung free, but struggle as he might, he didn't seem to be able to connect with anything. When the demon banked and swerved suddenly, he let out a scream. Pennywise laughed. Then they were spinning through a narrow metal tunnel and into a much larger, wider room. Instead of dropping them unceremoniously, the flying demon set them down gently on the floor.

Much to Eddie's surprise. Pennywise let him go.

Eddie jerked away from him and stumbled into the middle of the room, looking around wildly. It was a big space, probably once some kind of machine room. Machinery still lined the walls, shoved out of the way to create a wide square space in the center. The floor was thick black metal, splotted here and there with darker stains. In the middle of the empty space were four basins, big enough to wash a dog in. The interiors of the first two were stained a dark rust brown. The third was full of dark red liquid. The fourth was empty.

A metal footlocker stood behind the bowls. A dark cloth had been thrown over it. As he drew closer, he saw that on top of the cloth rested a silver sword that glowed with a blackish light, almost an absence of illumination: a radiant, visible darkness.

Eddie whirled around and stared at Pennywise, who was quietly watching him. "How could you do it?" he demanded. "How could you kill Stan? He was just a—he was just a boy, just an ordinary human—"

"He wasn't human," said Pennywise, in his silky voice. "He had become a monster. You just couldn't see it, Eddie, because it wore the face of a friend."

"He wasn't a monster." Eddie moved a little closer to the Sword. It looked huge, heavy. He wondered if he could lift it—and even if he could, could he swing it? "He was still Stan."

"Don't think I'm not sympathetic to your situation," said Pennywise. He stood unmoving in the single shaft of light that came down from the trapdoor in the ceiling. "It was the same for me when Jimothy was bitten."

"He told me," Eddie spat at him. "You gave him a dagger and told him to kill himself."

"That was a mistake," said Pennywise.

"At least you admit it—"

"I should have killed him myself. It would have showed that I cared."

Eddie shook his head. "But you didn't. You've never cared about anyone. Not even my mother. Not even Ben. They were just things that belonged to you."

"But isn't that what love is, Edward? Ownership? 'I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine,' as the Song of Songs goes."

"No. And don't quote the Bible at me. I don't think you get it." Eddie was standing very near to the locker now, the hilt of the Sword within reaching distance. His fingers were wet with sweat and he dried them surreptitiously on his jeans. "It's not just that someone belongs to you, it's that you give yourself to them. I doubt you've ever given anything to anyone. Except maybe nightmares."

"To give yourself to someone?" The thin smile didn't waver. "As you've given yourself to Richard Tozier?"

Eddie's hand, which had been lifting toward the Sword, spasmed into a fist. He pulled it back against his chest, staring at him unbelievably. "*What?*"

"You think I haven't seen the way you two look at each other? The way he says your name? You may not think I can feel, but that doesn't mean I can't see feelings in others." Pennywise's tone was

cool, every word a sliver of ice stabbing into his ears. "I suppose we have only ourselves to blame, your mother and I; we didn't raise you the right way, the revulsion that is two men *loving* each other."

"I don't know what you mean." Eddie's teeth were chattering.

"I think I make myself plain enough." He had moved out of the light. His face was a study in shadow. And in that moment, Eddie was afraid.

"If you ask nicely, maybe I'll listen to you." Ben stared at the Inquisitor.

The Inquisitor looked as if she wanted to roll her eyes but had forgotten how. "I need to talk to you."

Ben frowned. "Now?"

She put a hand on his arm. "Now."

"You're insane." Ben looked down the length of the ship. It looked like a Bosch painting of hell. The darkness was full of demons: lumbering, howling, squawking, and slashing out with claws and teeth. Nephilim darted back and forth, their weapons bright in the shadows. Ben could see already that there weren't enough Shadowhunters. Not nearly enough. "There's no way—we're in the middle of a battle—"

The Inquisitor's bony grip was surprisingly strong. "Now." She pushed him, and he took a step back, too surprised to do anything else, and then another, until they were standing in the recess of a wall. She let go of Ben and felt in the folds of her dark cloak, drawing forth two seraph blades. She whispered their names, and then several words Ben didn't know, and flung them at the deck, one on either side of him. They stuck, points down, and a single blue-white sheet of light sprang up from them, walling Ben and the Inquisitor off from the rest of the ship.

"Are you locking me up again?" Ben demanded, staring at the Inquisitor in disbelief.

"This isn't a Malachi Configuration. You can get out of it if you want." Her thin hands clasped each other tightly. "Jonathan—"

"You mean Ben." He could no longer see the battle past the wall of white light, but he could still hear the sounds of it, the screams and the howling of the demons. If he turned his head, he could just catch a glimpse of a small section of ocean, sparkling with light like diamonds scattered over the surface of a mirror. There were about a dozen boats down there, the sleek, multi-hulled trimarans used on the lakes in Derry. Shadowhunter boats. "What are you doing here, Inquisitor? Why did you come?"

"You were right," she said. "About Pennywise. He wouldn't make the trade."

"He told you to let me die." Ben felt suddenly light-headed.

"The moment he refused, of course, I called the Conclave together and brought them here. I—I owe you and your family an apology."

"Noted," said Ben. He hated apologies. "Bill and Richie? They won't be punished for helping me?"

"Bill's here, and no, they won't be punished."

She was still staring at him, eyes searching. "I can't understand Pennywise," she said. "For a father to throw away the life of his child, his only son—"

"Yeah," said Ben. His head ached and he wished she would shut up, or that a demon would attack them. "It's a conundrum, all right."

"Unless..."

Now he looked at her in surprise. "Unless what?"

She jabbed a finger at his shoulder. "When did you get that?"

Ben looked down and saw that the spider demon's poison had eaten a hole in his shirt, leaving a good deal of his left shoulder bare. "The shirt? At Macy's. Winter sale."

“The *scar*. This scar, here on your shoulder.”

“Oh, that.” Ben wondered at the intensity of her gaze. “I’m not sure. Something that happened when I was very young, my father said. An accident of some kind. Why?”

Breath hissed through the Inquisitor’s teeth. “It can’t be,” she murmured. “*You* can’t be—”

“I can’t be what?”

There was a note of uncertainty in the Inquisitor’s voice. “All those years,” she said, “when you were growing up—you truly thought you were Daniel Hanscom’s son—?”

Sharp fury went through Ben, made all the more painful by the tiny stab of disappointment that accompanied it. “By the Angel,” he spat, “you dragged me off here in the middle of battle just to ask me the same goddamned questions again? You didn’t believe me the first time and you still don’t believe me. You’ll never believe me, despite everything that’s happened, even though everything I told you was the truth.” He jabbed a finger toward whatever was happening on the other side of the wall of light. “I should be out there fighting. Why are you keeping me here? So after this is all over, if any of us are still even alive, you can go to the Clave and tell them I wouldn’t fight on your side against my father? Nice try.”

She had gone even paler than he’d thought possible. “Jonathan, that’s not what I—”

“My name is *Ben*!” he shouted. The Inquisitor flinched, her mouth half-open, as if she were still about to say something. Ben didn’t want to hear it. He stalked past her, nearly knocking her to the side, and kicked at one of the seraph blades in the deck. It toppled over and the wall of light vanished.

Beyond it was chaos. Dark shapes hurtled to and fro on deck, demons clambered over crumpled bodies, and the air was full of smoke and screaming. He strained to see anyone he knew in the melee. Where was Richie? Bill?

“Ben!” The Inquisitor hurried after him, her face pulled tight with fear. “Ben, you don’t have a weapon, at least take—”

She broke off as a demon loomed up out of the darkness in front of Ben like an iceberg off the bow of a ship. It wasn’t one he’d seen before tonight; this one had the wrinkled face and agile hands of a huge monkey, but the long, barbed tail of a scorpion. Its eyes were rolling and yellow. It hissed at him through broken needle teeth. Before Ben could duck, its tail shot forward with the speed of a striking cobra. He saw the needle tip whipping toward his face—

And for the second time that night, a shadow passed between him and death. Drawing a long-bladed knife, the Inquisitor threw herself in front of him, just in time for the scorpion’s sting to bury itself in her chest.

She screamed, but stayed on her feet. The demon’s tail whipped back, ready for another strike—but the Inquisitor’s knife had already left her hand, flying straight and true. The runes carved on its blade gleamed as it sliced through the demon’s throat. With a hiss, as of air escaping from a punctured balloon, it folded inward, its tail spasming as it vanished.

The Inquisitor crumpled to the deck. Ben knelt down beside her and laid a hand on her shoulder, rolling her onto her back. Blood was spreading across the gray front of her blouse. Her face was slack and yellow, and for a moment Ben thought she was already dead.

“Inquisitor?” He couldn’t say her first name, not even now. Her eyes fluttered open. Their whites were already dulling. With a great effort she beckoned him toward her. He bent closer, close enough to hear her whisper in his ear, whisper on a last exhale of breath—

“What?” Ben said, bewildered. “What does that mean?”

There was no answer. The Inquisitor had slumped back against the deck, her eyes wide open and staring, her mouth curved into what almost looked like a smile.

Ben sat back on his heels, numb and staring. She was dead. Dead because of him.

Something seized hold of the back of his jacket and hauled him to his feet. Ben clapped a hand to his belt—realized he was weaponless—and twisted around to see a familiar pair of blue eyes staring into his with utter incredulity.

“Y-you’re alive,” Bill said—two short words, but there was a wealth of feeling behind them. The relief on his face was plain, as was his exhaustion. Despite the chill in the air, his auburn hair was plastered to his cheeks and forehead with sweat. His clothes and skin were streaked with blood and there was a long rip in the sleeve of his armored jacket, as if something jagged and sharp had torn it open. He clutched a bloody *guisarme* in his right hand and Ben’s collar in the other.

“I won’t be for long if you don’t give me a weapon, though.” Ben admitted.

With a quick glance around, Bill let go of Ben, took a seraph blade from his belt, and handed it over. “H-here,” he said. “It’s called *Samandiriel*.”

Ben barely had the blade in his hand when a medium-size Drevak demon scuttled toward them, chittering imperiously. Ben raised *Samandiriel*, but Bill had already dispatched the creature with a jabbing blow from his *guisarme*.

“Nice weapon,” Ben said, but Bill was looking past him, at the crumpled gray figure on the deck.

“Is that the Inquisitor? I-is she...?”

“She’s dead,” Ben said.

Bill’s jaw set. “Good r-riddance. How’d she get it?”

Ben was about to reply when he was interrupted by a loud cry of “Bill! Ben!” It was Richie, hurrying toward them through the stench and smoke. He looked down at the body. “Is that...?”

“We have to get out of this boat.” Ben said.

Richie frowned. “Eddie’s still here.” There was desperation on his

tone.

"R-Richie!" Bill exclaimed. "We are all going to d-die. There are too many of them. We're being slaughtered. The Inquisitor d-deserved to die for this—this is all her fault."

"A Scorpios demon tried to kill me," Ben said, wondering why he was saying it, why he was defending someone he hated. "The Inquisitor got in its way. Saved my life."

"She *did*?" Astonishment was clear in Bill's tone. "Why?"

"I guess she decided I was worth saving."

"But she always—" Richie broke off, his expression changing to one of alarm. "Ben, behind you—two of them—"

Ben whirled. Two demons were approaching: a Ravener, with its alligator-like body and serrated teeth, its scorpion tail curling forward over its back, and a Drevak, its pale white maggot-flesh gleaming in the moonlight. Ben heard Bill, behind him, suck in an alarmed breath; then Samandiriel left his hand, cutting a silvery path through the air. It sliced through the Ravener's tail, just below the pendulous poison sac at the end of its long stinger.

The Ravener howled. The Drevak turned, confused—and got the poison sac full in the face. The sac broke open, drenching the Drevak in venom. It emitted a single garbled scream and crumpled, its head eaten away to the bone. Blood and poison splattered the deck as the Drevak vanished. The Ravener, blood gushing from its tail stump, dragged itself a few more paces forward before it, too, disappeared.

Ben bent and picked up Samandiriel gingerly. The metal deck was still sizzling where the Ravener's poison had spilled on it, pocking it with tiny spreading holes like cheesecloth.

"Guys, w-we have to get out of here," Bill was on his feet.

Richie shot him an annoyed look. "I won't leave without Eddie and Stan."

"You two can fight like children," Ben pointed. "I'll deal with *that*."

Something was coming toward them through the smoke and flames, something huge, humped, and massive. Easily five times the size of any other demon on the ship, it had an armored body, many-limbed, each appendage ending in a spiked chitinous talon. Its feet were elephant feet, huge and splayed. It had the head of a giant mosquito, Ben saw as it came closer, complete with insectile eyes and a dangling blood-red feeding tube.

Richie sucked in his breath. "What the hell is it?"

Ben thought for a moment. "Big," he said finally. "Very."

He turned and looked at Bill, and then at Richie. Something inside him told him that this might very well be the last time he ever saw them, and yet he still wasn't afraid, not for himself. He wanted to say something to them, maybe that he loved them, that either one of them was worth more to him than a thousand Mortal Instruments and the power they could bring. But the words wouldn't come.

The demon, bearing down on Ben, made a sudden swerve and rushed toward Bill, its bloody feeding tube whipping back and forth hungrily. Richie spun to block Bill, but the metal deck he was standing on, rotted with poison, crumbled underneath him. His foot plunged through and he fell hard against the deck.

Bill had time to shout Ben's name, and then the demon was on him. He stabbed at it with his guisarme, plunging the sharp end of it deep into the demon's flesh. The creature reared back, screaming a weirdly human scream, black blood spraying from the wound. Bill retreated, reaching for another weapon, just as the demon's talon whipped around, knocking him to the deck. Then its feeding tube wrapped around him.

Ben raised Samandiriel. Light blazed forth from the seraph blade, bright as a falling star. The demon flinched back, making a low hissing sound. It relaxed its grip on Bill and for a moment Ben thought it might be going to let him go. Then it whipped its head back with a sudden, startling speed and flung Bill with immense force. Bill hit the blood-slippy deck hard, skidded across it—and fell, with a single hoarse cry, over the side of the ship.

Richie was shouting Bill's name; his screams were like spikes being driven into Ben's ears. Samandiriel was still blazing in his hand. Its light illuminated the demon stalking toward him, its insectile gaze bright and predatory, but all he could see was Bill; Bill falling over the side of the ship, Bill drowning in the black water far below. He thought he tasted seawater in his own mouth, or it might have been blood. The demon was almost on him; he raised Samandiriel in his hand and flung it—the demon squealed, a high, agonized sound—and then the deck gave way beneath Ben with a screech of crumbling metal and he fell into darkness.

25. The Truth of Evil

“You’re wrong,” Eddie said, but his voice held no conviction. “You don’t know anything about me or Richie. You’re just trying to—”

“To what? I’m trying to reach you, Edward. To make you understand.” There was no feeling in Pennywise’s voice that Eddie could detect beyond a faint amusement.

“You’re laughing at us. You think you can use me to hurt Richie, so you’re laughing at us. You’re not even angry anymore,” he added. “A real father would be angry.”

“I am a real father. The same blood that runs in my veins runs in yours.”

“You’re not my father. Jim is,” said Eddie, almost wearily. “We’ve been over this.”

“You only look to Jim as your father because of his relationship with your mother—”

“Their *relationship*?” Eddie laughed out loud. “Jim and my mother are friends.”

For a moment, Eddie was sure he saw a look of surprise pass over his face. But “Is that so,” was all he said. And then, “You really think he endured all this—Jimothy, I mean—this life of silence and hiding and running, this devotion to the protection of a secret even he didn’t fully understand, just for *friendship*? You know very little about people, Edward, at your age, and less about men.”

“You can make all the innuendoes about Jim you want. It won’t make any difference. You’re wrong about him, just like you’re wrong about Richie or Ben. You have to give everyone ugly motives for everything they do, because ugly motives are all you understand.”

“Is that what it would be if he loved your mother? Ugly?” said Pennywise. “What’s so ugly about love, Edward? Or is it that you sense, deep down, that your precious *Jim* is neither truly human nor

truly capable of feelings as we would understand them—”

“Jim’s as human as I am,” Eddie flung at him. “You’re just a bigot.”

“Oh, no,” Pennywise said. “I’m anything but that.” He moved a little closer to Eddie, and Eddie stepped in front of the Sword, blocking it from his view. “You think of me that way because you look at me and at what I do through the lens of your mundane understanding of the world. Mundane humans create distinctions between themselves, distinctions that seem ridiculous to any Shadowhunter. Their distinctions are based on race, religion, national identity, any of a dozen minor and irrelevant markers.

“To mundanes these seem logical, for though mundanes cannot see, understand, or acknowledge the demon worlds, still somewhere buried in their ancient memories, they know that there are those that walk this earth that are other. That do not belong, that mean only harm and destruction. Since the demon threat is invisible to mundanes, they must assign the threat to others of their own kind. They place the face of their enemy onto the face of their neighbor, and thus are generations of misery assured.”

He took a step towards him and Eddie instinctively moved backward; he was pressed up against the footlocker now. “I’m not like that,” Pennywise went on. “I can see the truth of it. Mundanes see as through a glass, darkly, but Shadowhunters—we see face-to-face. We know the truth of evil, and know that while it walks among us, it is not of us. What does not belong to our world must not be allowed to take root here, to grow like a poisonous flower and extinguish all life.”

Eddie had meant to go for the Sword and then for Pennywise, but his words shook him. His voice was so soft, so persuasive, and it wasn’t as if Eddie thought demons should be allowed to stay on earth, to drain it away to ashes as they’d drained away so many other worlds... It almost made sense, what he said, but—

“Jim isn’t a demon,” he said.

“It seems to me, Edward,” said Pennywise, “that you’ve had very little experience of what a demon is and what it is not. You have met

a few Downworlders who seemed to you to be kind enough, like your friend Beverly, and it is through the lens of their kindness that you view the world. Demons, to you, are hideous creatures that leap out from the shadows to rend and attack. And there are such creatures. But there are also demons of deep subtlety and secrecy, demons who walk among humans unrecognized and unhindered. Yet I have seen them do such dreadful things that their more bestial colleagues seem gentle in comparison. There was a demon in London that I once knew, who posed as a very powerful financier. He was never alone, so it was difficult for me to get close enough to kill him, though I knew what he was. He would have his servants bring him animals and young children—anything that was small and helpless—”

“Stop.” Eddie put his hands up to his ears. “I don’t want to hear this.”

But Pennywise's voice droned on, inexorable, muffled but not inaudible. “He would eat them slowly, over the course of many days. He had his tricks, his ways of keeping them alive through the worst imaginable tortures. If you can imagine a child trying to crawl to you with half its body torn away—”

“*Stop!*” Eddie tore his hands away from his ears. “That’s enough, enough!”

“Demons feed on death and pain and madness,” Pennywise said. “When I kill, it is because I must. You grew up in a falsely beautiful paradise surrounded by fragile glass walls, my son. Your mother created the world she wanted to live in and she brought you up in it, but she never told you it was an illusion. And all the time the demons waited with their weapons of blood and terror to smash the glass and pull you free of the lie.”

“You smashed the walls,” Eddie whispered. “*You* dragged me into all this. No one but you.”

“And the glass that cut you, the pain you felt, the blood? Do you blame me for that as well? I was not the one who put you into the prison.”

“Stop it. Just stop talking.” Eddie’s head was ringing. He wanted to scream at him, *You kidnapped my mother, you did this, it’s your fault!*

But he had begun to see what Jim had meant when he'd said you couldn't argue with Pennywise. Somehow he'd made it impossible for Eddie to disagree with him without feeling as if he were standing up for demons who bit children in half.

The edge of the locker behind Eddie was biting into the back of his legs. He could feel the cold coming off the Sword, making the hair on the back of his neck prickle. "What is it you want from me?" he asked Pennywise.

"What makes you think I want anything from you?"

"You wouldn't be talking to me otherwise. You'd have whacked me on the head and be waiting around for—for whatever the next step is after this."

"The next step," said Pennywise, "is for your Shadowhunter friends to track you down and for me to tell them that if they want to retrieve you alive, they'll trade the werewolf boy for you. I still need his blood."

"They'll never trade Mike for me!"

"That's where you're wrong," said Pennywise. "They know the value of a Downworlder as compared to that of a Shadowhunter child. They'll make the trade. The Clave requires it."

"The Clave? You mean—that's part of the Law?"

"Codified into its very being," said Pennywise. "Now do you see? We are not so very different, the Clave and I, or Jonathan and I, or even you and I, Edward. We merely have a small disagreement as to method." He smiled, and stepped forward to close the space between them.

Moving more quickly than he would have thought he could, Eddie reached behind him and snatched up the Soul-Sword. It was as heavy as he'd thought it would be, so heavy he nearly overbalanced. Putting out a hand to steady himself, he lifted it, pointing the blade directly at Pennywise.

Richie's fall ended abruptly when he struck a hard metal surface with enough force to rattle his teeth. He coughed, tasting blood in his mouth, and staggered painfully to his feet.

He was standing on a bare metal catwalk painted a dull green. The inside of the ship was hollow, a great echoing chamber of metal with dark outward-curving walls. Looking up, Richie could see a tiny patch of starry sky through the smoking hole in the hull far above.

The belly of the ship was a maze of catwalks and ladders that seemed to lead nowhere, twisting in on each other like the guts of a giant snake. It was freezing cold. Richie could see his breath puffing out in white clouds when he exhaled. There was very little light. He squinted into the shadows, then reached into his pocket to retrieve his witchlight rune-stone.

Its white glow lit the dimness. The catwalk was long, with a ladder at the far end leading down to a lower level. As Richie moved toward it, something glinted at his feet.

He bent down. It was a stele. He couldn't help but stare around him, as if half-expecting someone to materialize out of the shadows; how the hell had a Shadowhunter stele gotten down here? He picked it up carefully. All steles had a sort of aura to them, a ghostly imprint of their owner's personality. This one sent a shot of painful recognition through him. *Eddie*.

A sudden, soft laugh broke the silence. Richie spun around, shoving the stele through his belt. In the glare of the witchlight, Richie could see a dark figure standing at the end of the catwalk. The face was hidden in shadow.

"Who's there?" he called.

There was no answer, only a sense that someone was laughing at him. Richie's hand went automatically to his belt, but he had dropped the seraph blade when he fell. He was out of weapons.

But what had his father always taught him? Used correctly, almost anything could be a weapon. He moved slowly toward the figure, his eyes taking in the various details around him—a strut he could catch hold of and swing from, kicking out with his feet; an exposed bit of

broken metal he could throw an opponent against, puncturing their spine. All these thoughts went through his head in a split second, the single split second before the figure at the end of the catwalk turned, his dark hair shining in the witchlight, and Richie recognized him.

Richie stopped dead in his tracks. “*Father?*”

Wentworth Tozier smiled. He was wearing his black armor, and gauntlet gloves that shone like the carapaces of black insects. “My son.”

The first thing Bill was aware of was freezing cold. The second was that he couldn’t breathe. He tried to suck in air and his body spasmed. He sat upright, expelling dirty river water from his lungs in a bitter flood that made him gag and choke.

Finally he could breathe, though his lungs felt like they were on fire. Gasping, he looked around. He was sitting on a corrugated metal platform—no, it was the back of a truck. A pickup truck, floating in the middle of the river. His hair and clothes were streaming cold water. Beverly was sitting opposite him, regarding him with blue eyes that glowed in the dark. Bill flinched and tried to pull away but she grabbed his arm.

“Relax! It’s me.” Beverly said.

His teeth began to chatter. “What—what happened?”

“You almost drowned at the East River,” She said, and Bill saw, as if for the first time, that Beverly’s clothes were soaking wet too, sticking to her body like a dark second skin. “I pulled you out.”

Bill’s head was pounding. He felt at his belt for his stele, but it was gone. He tried to think back—the ship, overrun with demons; Richie falling and Ben disappearing; blood, everywhere underfoot, the demon attacking—

“Richie! He was c-climbing down when I fell—”

“He’s fine. He made it to the boat. I saw him.” The voice of Eleven

interrupted him. Bill almost jumped and stared at her. She was giving them both a curious glance. "You, on the other hand, might have a concussion."

"I need to get b-back to the battle." Bill got to his feet. "You're warlocks. Can't you, I don't know, fly me back to the boat or something? And fix my concussion while you're at it?"

"Just calm down;" Beverly grabbed his arm. "You're in a weak state for a battle."

"You don't get it," Bill pushed his arm away. "I n-need to get there."

"I *do* get it," Beverly spoke in a calm tone. "My best friends are there too."

"Then let m-me help them," Bill pleaded.

Eleven sank back against the side of the truck bed. In the starlight her eyes were chips of green and gold, hard and flat as jewels. "I would help you," she said. "But we can't. Stripping the protection wards off the ship was bad enough—it's a strong, strong enchantment, demon-based—but when you fell, Beverly had to put a fast spell on the truck so it wouldn't sink when she lost consciousness. And I will lose consciousness. We both will. It's just a matter of time."

Beverly passed a hand across her eyes. "I didn't want you to drown," she said. "The enchantment should hold enough for you to get the truck back to land."

"I—didn't realize," Bill looked at Beverly, at her eyes. He realized that their glowing wasn't because the back of the truck was dark, they were actually irradiating *light*. "Y-your eyes..." He pointed.

Beverly frowned and Eleven seemed to notice too, and he gave her a small smile. "It seems like you've got your Mark, Beverly." She sighed. "It was about damn time."

"I—what?" Beverly hurried to the window and looked at her reflection, her bright blue eyes staring back at her, and immediately the light disappeared, and reappeared again and disappeared again. "Oh my God." Beverly gasped.

Bill put his hands out. They were pale in the moonlight, wrinkled from water and dotted with dozens of silver scars. He pointed his left hand at Beverly and his right hand to Eleven. Both of them frowned in confusion.

“Take my hands,” Bill said. “And take m-my strength too. Whatever of it you can use to—to keep yourself going.”

Beverly didn’t move. “I thought you had to get back to the ship.”

“I h-have to fight,” said Bill. “But that’s what you’re doing, isn’t it? You’re part of the fight just as much as the Shadowhunters on the ship—and I know you c-can take some of my strength, I’ve heard of warlocks doing that—so I’m offering. T-take it. It’s yours.”

“My son.”

“Don’t call me that,” Richie said, and then, feeling a tremor begin in his hands, “You’re not real.”

“Aren’t I?” Wentworth got one step closer, Richie got one step away. “Then how are you seeing me right now?”

“Y-you’re just...” Richie’s voice cracked. “A demon.”

“That’s how you refer to your own father, Richard?” Wentworth sounded almost hurt.

“I saw you *die*,” Richie wanted to shout innumerable things at him. “When I was a child, I saw you getting killed.”

“Did you?” Wentworth said, his voice was firm and calm. “Maybe you just were hallucinating back then. Children are known for their infinite imagination.”

“Stop talking” Richie was furious. “Where’s Pennywise? Eddie?”

Wentworth glanced up, as if he could see through the hull of the ship to the carnage on deck. “I would have thought you’d want to be fighting with the rest of your Shadowhunter friends. Pity their efforts

are for nothing.”

“You don't know that.” Richie sucked in a breath. “Stan and Mike—”

“Oh, they're dead. Both of them.” Wentworth's tone was casual, even soft. “How many have to die, Richard, before you see the truth?”

Despite the cold, Richie had begun to sweat. “What?”

“You and I, we're alike,” said Wentworth. “You have my courage. And you have that quality that causes others to give their lives for you without question.”

“I don't *want* people giving their lives for me,” he cried.

“No. You do. You like knowing that Ben and Bill would die for you. That Eddie would. Like your mother did. Because she *did* die for you, didn't she, Richard?”

“No!” Richie's hand shot out and seized the twisted metal strut. It came off in his hand with an explosive snap, its broken edge jagged and wickedly sharp, and drove the strut directly into his father's chest.

Wentworth's mouth opened. He staggered back, the end of the strut protruding from his chest. For a moment Richie could only stare, thinking, *I was wrong—it's really him*—and then Wentworth seemed to collapse in on himself, his body crumbling away like sand. The air was full of the smell of burning as Wentworth's body turned to ash that blew away on the cold air.

A great sense of weakness overwhelmed him. “Agramon,” Richie whispered, and fell to his knees on the catwalk.

It didn't seem like the migraine was going away anytime soon. The effort of clambering down one-handed cleared Ben's head. He dropped from the last rung to find himself on a second narrow catwalk that ran along the side of a vast metal chamber. There were dozens of other catwalks laddering the walls and a variety of pipes and machinery. Banging sounds came from inside the pipes, and

every once in a while one of the pipes would give off a blast of what looked like steam, though the air remained bitterly cold.

Quite a place you've got for yourself here, Father, Ben thought. The bare industrial interior of the ship didn't fit with the Pennywise he knew, who was particular about the type of cut crystal his decanters were made out of. Ben glanced around. It was a labyrinth down here; there was no way to know which direction he should go. He turned to climb down the next ladder and noticed a dark red smear on the metal floor.

Blood. He scraped the toe of his boot through it. It was still damp, slightly tacky. Fresh blood. His pulse quickened. Partway down the catwalk, he saw another spot of red, and then another a farther distance away, like a trail of bread crumbs in a fairy tale.

Ben followed the blood, his boots echoing loudly on the metal catwalk. The pattern of the blood splatters was peculiar, not as if there had been a fight, but more as if someone had been carried, bleeding, along the catwalk—

He reached a door. It was made of black metal, silvered here and there with dents and chips. There was a bloody handprint around the knob. Gripping the jagged strut more tightly, Ben pushed the door open.

A wave of even colder air hit him and he sucked in a breath. The room was empty except for a metal pipe that ran along one wall, and what looked like a heap of sacking in the corner. A little light came in through a porthole high up in the wall. As Ben stepped gingerly forward, the light from the porthole fell on the heap in the corner and he realized that it wasn't a pile of trash after all, but a body.

Ben's heart started to bang like an unlocked door in a windstorm. The metal floor was sticky with blood. His boots pulled away from it with an ugly suctioning sound as he crossed the room and bent down beside the crumpled figure in the corner. A boy, dark-haired and dressed in jeans and a blood-soaked blue T-shirt.

Ben took the body by the shoulder and heaved. It flipped over, limp and boneless, brown eyes staring sightlessly upward. Ben's breath

caught in his throat. It was Stan.

He was white as paper. There was an ugly gash at the base of his throat, and both wrists had been slashed, leaving gaping, ragged-edged wounds.

Ben sank to his knees, still holding Stan's shoulder. He thought hopelessly of Eddie and Beverly, of the misery they both would feel when they find out about this. How this will broke them both.

When Ben was nine, his father had explained to him all the ways to kill vampires. Stake them. Cut their heads off and set them to burning like eerie jack-o'-lanterns. Let the sun scorch them to ashes. Or drain their blood. They needed blood to live, they ran on it, like cars ran on gasoline. Looking at the ragged wound in Stan's throat, it wasn't hard to see what Pennywise had done.

Ben reached out to close Stan's staring eyes. If Eddie and Beverly had to see him dead, better they don't see him like this. He moved his hand down to the collar of Stan's shirt, meaning to tug it up, to cover the gash.

Stan moved. His eyelids twitched and opened, his eyes rolled back to the whites. He gurgled then, a faint sound, lips curling back, showing the points of vampire fangs. The breath rattled in his slashed throat.

Nausea rose in the back of Ben's throat, his hand tightening on Stan's collar. *He wasn't dead.* But God, the pain, it must be incredible. He couldn't heal, couldn't regenerate, not without—

Not without blood. Ben let go of Stan's shirt and dragged his right sleeve up with his teeth. Using the jagged tip of the broken strut, he slashed a deep cut lengthwise down his wrist. Blood gushed to the surface of the skin. He dropped the strut; it hit the metal floor with a clang. He could smell his own blood in the air, sharp and coppery.

He looked down at Stan, who hadn't moved. The blood was running down Ben's hand now, his wrist stinging. He held it out over Sta's face, letting the blood drip down his fingers, spill onto Stan's mouth. There was no reaction. Stan wasn't moving. Ben moved closer; he was kneeling over Stan now, his breath making white puffs in the icy

air. He leaned down, pressed his bleeding wrist against Stan's mouth. "Drink my blood, idiot," he whispered. "Drink it."

For a moment nothing happened. Then Stan's eyes fluttered shut. Ben felt a sharp sting in his wrist, a sort of pull, a hard pressure—and Stan's right hand flew up and clamped onto Ben's arm, just above the elbow. Stan's back arched off the floor, the pressure on Ben's wrist increasing as Stan's fangs sank deeper. Pain shot up Ben's arm. "Okay," Ben said. "Okay, enough."

Stan's eyes opened. The whites were gone, the dark brown irises focused on Ben. There was color in his cheeks, a hectic flush like a fever. His lips were slightly parted, the white fangs stained with blood.

"Stan?" Ben said.

Stan rose up. He moved with incredible speed, knocking Ben sideways and rolling on top of him. Ben's head hit the metal floor, his ears ringing as Simon's teeth sank into his neck. He tried to twist away, but the other boy's arms were like iron bars, pinning him to the ground, fingers digging into his shoulders.

But Stan wasn't hurting him—not really—the pain that had started out sharp faded to a sort of dull burn, pleasant the way the burn of the stele was sometimes pleasant. A drowsy sense of peace stole through Ben's veins and he felt his muscles relax; the hands that had been trying to push Stan away a moment ago now pressed him closer. He could feel the beat of his own heart, feel it slowing, its hammering fading to a softer echo. A shimmering darkness crept in at the corners of his vision, beautiful and strange. Ben closed his eyes—

Pain lanced through his neck. He gasped and his eyes flew open; Stan was sitting up on him, staring down with wide eyes, his hand across his own mouth. Stan's wounds were gone, though fresh blood stained the front of his shirt.

Ben could feel the pain of his bruised shoulders again, the slash across his wrist, his punctured throat. He could no longer hear his heart beating, but knew it was slamming away inside his chest.

Stan took his hand away from his mouth. The fangs were gone. "I could have killed you," he said. There was a sort of pleading in his voice.

"I would have let you," said Ben.

Stan stared down at him, then made a noise in the back of his throat. He rolled off Ben and hit the floor on his knees, hugging his elbows. Ben could see the dark tracery of Stan's veins through the pale skin of his throat, branching blue and purple lines. Veins full of blood.

My blood. Ben sat up. He fumbled for his stele. Dragging it across his arm felt like hauling a lead pipe across a football field. His head throbbed. When he finished the *iratze*, he leaned his head back against the wall behind him, breathing hard, the pain leaving him as the healing rune took effect. *My blood in his veins.*

"I'm sorry." Stan said. "I'm so sorry."

The healing rune was having its effect. Ben's head started to clear and the banging in his chest slowed. He got to his feet, carefully, expecting a wave of dizziness, but he felt only a little weak and tired. Stan was still on his knees, staring down at his hands. Ben reached down and grabbed the back of his shirt, hauling him to his feet. "Don't apologize," he said, letting Stan go. "Just get moving. Pennywise has Eddie and we haven't got much time."

26. By The Light of Dawn

The second his fingers closed around the hilt of Maellartach, a searing blast of cold shot up Eddie's arm. Pennywise watched with an expression of mild interest as Eddie gasped with pain, his fingers going numb. He clutched desperately at the Sword, but it slipped from his grasp and clattered to the ground at his own feet.

He barely saw Pennywise move. A moment later he was standing in front of Eddie with the Sword in his grasp. Eddie's hand was stinging. He glanced down and saw that a red, burning weal was rising along his palm.

"Did you really think," Pennywise said, a tinge of disgust coloring his voice, "that I'd let you near a weapon I thought you could *use*?" He shook his head. "You didn't understand a word I said, did you? It appears that of my two children, only one seems capable of understanding the truth."

Eddie closed his injured hand into a fist, almost welcoming the pain. "If you mean Ben, he hates you too."

Pennywise swung the Sword up, bringing the tip of it level with Eddie's collarbone. "That is enough," he said, "out of you."

The tip of the Sword was sharp; when Eddie breathed, it pricked his throat, and a trickle of blood threaded its way down his chest. The Sword's touch seemed to spill cold through his veins, sending sizzling ice particles through his arms and legs, numbing his hands.

"Ruined by your upbringing," Pennywise said. "Your mother was always a stubborn woman. It was one of the things I loved about her in the beginning. I thought she would stand by her ideals."

It was strange, Eddie thought with a detached sort of horror, that when he had seen his father before at Renwick's, his considerable personal charisma had been on display for Ben's benefit. Now Pennywise wasn't bothering, and without the surface patina of charm, he seemed—empty. Like a hollow statue, eyes cut out to show only darkness inside.

"Tell me, Edward—did your mother ever talk about me?"

"She told me my father was dead." *Don't say anything else*, he warned himself, but he was sure Pennywise could read the rest of the words in his eyes. *And I wish she had been telling the truth.*

"And she never told you you were different? Special?"

Eddie swallowed, and the tip of the blade cut a little deeper. More blood trickled down his chest. "She never told me I was a Shadowhunter."

"Do you know why," Pennywise said, looking down the length of the Sword at Eddie, "your mother left me?"

Tears burned the back of Eddie's throat. He made a choking noise. "You mean there was only *one* reason?"

"She told me," he went on, as if Eddie hadn't spoken, "that I had turned her first child into a monster. She left me before I could do the same to her second. You. *But she was too late.*"

The cold at Eddie's throat, in his limbs, was so intense that he was beyond shivering. It was as if the Sword was turning him to ice. "She'd never say that," Eddie whispered. "Ben isn't a monster. Neither am I."

"I wasn't talking about—"

The trapdoor over their heads slammed open and a shadowy figure dropped from the hole, landing just behind Pennywise. The person, Eddie saw with a bright shock of relief, was Richie, falling through the air like an arrow shot from a bow, sure of its target. He hit the floor with an assured lightness. He was clutching a bloodstained steel strut in one hand, its end broken off to a wicked point.

"Look what we have here," Pennywise said, staring at Richie with an superior yet odd glance. "Richard Tozier."

The moment the point of the Sword left Eddie's throat, the ice drained from him, taking all his strength with it. He sank to his knees, shivering uncontrollably. When he raised his hands to wipe

the tears away from his face, he saw that the tips of his fingers were white with the beginnings of frostbite.

Richie stared at him in horror then at Pennywise. "*What did you do to him?*"

"Nothing," Pennywise said, regaining control of himself. "Yet."

To Eddie's surprise, Richie paled, as if Pennywise's words had shocked him.

"You know, it's a pity," Pennywise went on. "That you came all this way for my son and yet, you came alone."

"I don't need anyone else," Richie said, his fear was gone and rage was clear on his voice. "I can kill you myself." And, in a blink, Richie was running towards Pennywise, the strut pointing to Pennywise's chest, but the duty failed as Pennywise in a quick move used his hand to drove the strut away from Richie's hands, landing a few meters away.

Eddie wanted to shout at Richie but the words couldn't come, it was as if fear had paralyzed his mouth. Pennywise grabbed Richie by the neck, making him face him.

"Look at you," Pennywise's voice was sharp. "You're just as dull as Wentworth." Richie was panting, using his hand to lower Pennywise's but he wasn't strong enough.

"*Screw...you*" Richie could say between grunts.

Pennywise gave a loud laugh, it was the most terrifying sound Eddie had heard in his entire life. "And you're just as immature, I see." His left hand joined the other and he started to choke Richie. Eddie wanted desperately to run to them. *Do something! He's dying!*

"Get the hell away from him!"

For a moment, Eddie thought he heard his own voice, but when he turned around, he saw Ben landed on his feet behind Pennywise, as well as another person.

The second figure landed beside Ben with the same lightness if not the same grace. Eddie saw the outline of a slender boy with dark hair and thought, *Bill*. It was only when he straightened and Eddie recognized the familiar face that he realized who it was.

He forgot the cold, the pain in his throat, forgot everything. “*Stan!*”

Stan looked across the room at him. Their eyes met for just a moment and Eddie hoped Stan could read in his face his full and overwhelming relief. The tears that had been threatening came, and spilled down his face. He didn’t move to wipe them away.

Pennywise turned his head to look behind him, and his mouth sagged in the first expression of honest surprise Eddie had ever seen on his face. He let go of Richie, as Richie fall to the floor ans started ti cough.

Pennywise whirled to face Ben and Stan.

“Jonathan,” Pennywise said, and though he spoke to Ben, his eyes were on Stan. “Why is it still alive? Revenants can regenerate, but not with such little blood in them.”

“You mean me?” Stan demanded. Eddiw stared. Stan sounded *different* . He didn’t sound like a kid smarting off to an adult; he sounded like someone who felt like he could face Pennywise on equal footing. Like someone who deserved to face him on equal footing. “Oh, that’s right, you left me for dead. Well, dead- er.”

“Shut up.” Ben shot a glare at Stan; his eyes were very dark. “Let me answer this.” He turned to his father. “I let Stan drink my blood,” he said. “So he wouldn’t die.”

Pennywise’s already severe face settled into harder lines, as if the bones were pushing out through the skin. “You *willingly* let a vampire drink your blood?”

Ben seemed to hesitate for a moment—he glanced over at Stan, who was staring fixedly at Pennywise with a look of intense hatred. Then he said, carefully, “Yes.”

“You have no idea what you’ve done, Jonathan,” said Pennywise in a

terrible voice. "No idea."

"I saved a life," said Ben. "One you tried to take. I know that much."

"Not a human life," said Pennywise. "You resurrected a monster that will only kill to feed again. His kind are always hungry—"

"I'm hungry right now," Stan said, and smiled to reveal that his fang teeth had slid from their sheaths. They glittered white and pointed against his lower lip. "I wouldn't mind a little more blood. Of course your blood would probably choke me, you poisonous piece of—"

Pennywise laughed. "I'd like to see you try it, revenant," he said. "When the Soul-Sword cuts you, you will burn as you die."

Eddie saw Ben's eyes go to the Sword, and then to him. There was an unspoken question in them. Quickly, Eddie said, "The Sword isn't turned. Not quite. He didn't get Mike's blood, so he didn't finish the ceremony—"

Pennywise turned toward him Sword in hand, and Eddie saw him smile. The Sword seemed to flick in Pennywise's grasp, and then something hit Eddie—it was like being knocked over by a wave, thrown down and then lifted against your will and tossed through the air. He rolled across the floor, helpless to stop himself, until he struck the bulkhead with bruising force. Eddie crumpled at the base of it, gasping with breathlessness and pain.

Stan started toward him at a run. Pennywise swung the Soul-Sword and a sheet of sheer, blazing fire rose up, sending him stumbling backward with its surging heat.

Eddie struggled to raise himself onto his elbows. His mouth was full of blood. The world swayed around him and he wondered how hard he'd hit his head and if he was going to pass out. He willed himself to stay conscious.

The fire had receded, but Stan was still crouched on the floor, looking dazed. Pennywise glanced briefly at him, and then at Ben. "If you kill the revenant now," he said, "you can still undo what you've done."

"No," Ben whispered.

"You won't kill a single vampire, not even at my order?"

In a quick motion, Richie was on his feet. Eddie stared at him surprised, for a moment he forgot Richie was even there.

Richie stood watching Pennywise without expression. "He's a vampire, that's true," he said. "But his name is Stan."

And he punched him in the face.

The sound echoed in the room, Eddie was shocked as Pennywise's body fell to the floor, shouting in pain. He touched his nose and drew his hand back, there was a lot of blood coming from it, a few drops falling to the floor.

"You foolish child," Pennywise got to his feet, without wiping the blood of his face. "I will—"

"Stop it!" Ben hurried to put a hand on his father's chest.

Pennywise pushed his hand away. "Jonathan—"

Richie's hand moved, quick as a flash of light, and something hurtled through the air toward Eddie. It fell a few inches from him, hitting the metal with a clang and rolling. His eyes widened.

It was his mother's stele.

As Pennywise was busy arguing with Ben, Eddie heaved himself up, gasping as pain lanced through his head. His eyes watered, his vision blurred; he reached out a shaking hand for the stele—and as his fingers touched it, he heard a voice, as clear inside his head as if his mother stood beside him. *Take the stele, Eddie. Use it. You know what to do.*

His fingers closed spasmodically around it. Eddie sat up, ignoring the wave of pain that went through his head and down his spine. He was a Shadowhunter, and pain was something you lived with. Dimly, he could hear Pennywise call his name, hear his footsteps, coming nearer—and Eddie flung himself at the bulkhead, thrusting the stele

forward with such force that when its tip touched the metal, he thought he heard the sizzle of something burning.

He began to draw. As always happened when he drew, the world fell away and there was only himself and the stele and the metal he drew on. He remembered standing outside Ben's cell whispering to himself, *Open, open, open*, and knew that he had drawn on all his strength to create the rune that had broken Ben's bonds. And he knew that the strength he had put into that rune was not a tenth, not a hundredth, of the strength he was putting into this. His hands burned and he cried out as he dragged the stele down the metal wall, leaving a thick black line like char behind it. *Open*.

All his frustration, all his disappointment, all his rage went through his fingers and into the stele and into the rune. *Open*. All his love, all his relief at seeing Stan alive, all his hope that they still might survive. *Open!*

His hand, still holding the stele, dropped to his lap. For a moment there was utter silence as all of them—Ben, Richie, Pennywise, even Stan—stared along with him at the rune that burned on the ship's bulkhead.

It was Stan who spoke, turning to Ben. "What does it say?"

But it was Pennywise who answered, not taking his eyes from the wall. There was a look on his face—not at all the look Eddie had expected, a look that mixed triumph and horror, despair and delight. "It says," he said, "*Mene mene tekel upharsin*."

Eddie staggered to his feet. "That's not what it says," he whispered. "It says open."

Pennywise met his eyes with his own. "Eddie—"

The scream of metal drowned out his words. The wall Eddie had drawn on, a wall made of sheets of solid steel, warped and shuddered. Rivets tore free of their housings and jets of water sprayed into the room.

He could hear Pennywise calling, but his voice was drowned out by

the deafening sounds of metal being wrenched from metal as every nail, every screw, and every rivet that held together the enormous ship began tearing free from its moorings.

Eddie tried to run toward the others, but fell to his knees as another surge of water came through the widening hole in the wall. This time the wave knocked him down, icy water drawing him under. Somewhere Richie was calling his name, with a voice loud and desperate over the screaming of the ship. Eddie shouted his name only once before he was sucked out the jagged hole in the bulkhead and into the river.

Eddie spun and kicked in the black water. Terror gripped him, terror of the blind darkness and of the depths of the river, the millions of tons of water all around him, pressing in on him choking out the air in his lungs. He couldn't tell which way was up or which direction to swim. He could no longer hold his breath. He sucked in a lungful of filthy water, his chest bursting with the pain, stars exploding behind his eyes. In his ears the sound of rushing water was replaced by a high, sweet, impossible singing. *I'm dying*, he thought in wonder. A pair of pale hands reached out of the black water and drew him close. Long hair drifted around him. *Mom*, Eddie thought, but before he could clearly see his mother's face, the darkness closed his eyes.

Eddie came back to consciousness with voices all around him and lights shining in his eyes. He was flat on his back on the corrugated steel of Jim's truck bed. The gray-black sky swam overhead. He could smell river water all around him, mixed with the smell of smoke and blood. White faces hovered over him like balloons on strings. They swam into focus as he blinked his eyes.

Jim. And Stan. They were both looking down at him with expressions of anxious concern. For a moment he thought Jim's hair had gone white; then, blinking, he realized it was full of ashes. In fact, so was the air—it tasted of ashes—and their clothes and skin were streaked with blackish grime.

Eddie coughed, tasting ash in his mouth. "Where's Richie?"

“He’s...” Stan’s eyes went to Jim, and Eddie felt his heart contract. “He’s all right, isn’t he?” he demanded. He struggled to sit up and a hard pain shot through his head. “Where is he? Where is *he*?”

“I’m here.” Richie appeared at the edge of his vision, his face in shadow. He knelt down next to Eddie. “I’m sorry. I should have been here when you woke up. It’s just...”

His voice cracked.

“It’s just what?” Eddie stared at him; backlit by starlight, his hair was more silver than black, his eyes bleached of color. His skin was streaked with black and gray.

“He thought you were dead too,” Jim said, and stood up abruptly. He was staring out at the river, at something Eddie couldn’t see. The sky was full of swirls of black and scarlet smoke, as if it were on fire.

“Dead too? Who else—?” Eddie broke off as a nauseating pain gripped him. Richie saw him expression and reached into his own pocket, bringing out his stele.

“Hold still, Eds.” There was a burning pain in his forearm, and then his head began to clear. Eddie sat up and saw that he was sitting on a wet plank shoved up against the back of the truck cab. The bed was full of several inches of sloshing water, mixed with swirls of the ash that was sifting down from the sky in a fine black rain. He glanced at the place where Richie had drawn a healing Mark on the inside of his arm. His weakness was already receding, as if he’d shot a jolt of strength into Eddie’s veins.

He traced the line of the iratze he’d drawn on Eddie’s arm with his fingers before he drew back. Richie’s hand felt as cold and wet as Eddie’s skin did. The rest of him was wet too; his hair damp and his soaked clothes sticking to his body.

There was an acrid taste in Eddie’s mouth, as if he’d licked the bottom of an ashtray. “What happened? Was there a fire?”

Richie glanced toward Jim, who was staring out at the heaving black-gray river. The water was dotted here and there with small boats, but

there was no sign of Pennywise's ship. "Yes," he said. "Pennywise's ship burned down to the waterline. There's nothing left."

"Where is everyone?" Eddie moved her gaze to Stan, who was the only one of them who was dry. There was a faint greenish cast to his already pale skin, as if he were sick or feverish. "Where is Ben? And Beverly?"

"They're on one of the other Shadowhunter boats. They're fine."

"And Eleven?" Eddie twisted around to look into the truck cab, but it was empty.

"She was needed to tend to some of the more badly wounded Shadowhunters," said Jim.

"But everyone's all right? Bill, Ben, Mike—they are all right, aren't they?" Eddie's voice sounded small and thin in his own ears.

"Bill was injured," said Jim. "So was Zack Denbrough. He'll be needing a good amount of time to heal. Many of the other Shadowhunters, including Malik and Joyce, are dead. This was a very hard battle, Eddie, and it didn't go well for us. Pennywise is gone. So is the Sword. The Conclave is in tatters. I don't know—"

He broke off. Eddie stared at him. There was something in his voice that frightened him. "I'm sorry," Eddie said. "This was my fault. If I hadn't—"

"If you hadn't done what you did, Pennywise would have killed everyone on the ship," said Richie fiercely. "You're the only thing that kept this from being a massacre."

Eddie stared at him. "You mean what I did with the rune?"

"You tore that ship to fragments," Jim said. "Every bolt, every rivet, anything that might have held it together, just snapped apart. The whole thing shuddered into pieces. The oil tanks came apart too. Most of us barely had time to jump into the water before it all started to burn. What you did—no one's ever seen anything like it."

"Oh," Eddie said in a small voice. "Was anyone—did I hurt anyone?"

"Quite a few of the demons drowned when the ship sank," said Richie. "But none of the Shadowhunters were hurt, no."

"Because they can swim?"

"Because they were rescued. Nixies pulled us all out of the water."

Eddie thought of the hands in the water, the impossible sweet singing that had surrounded him. So it hadn't been his mother after all. "You mean water faeries?"

"The Queen of the Seelie Court came through, in her way," said Richie. "She did promise us what aid was in her power."

"But how did she..." *How did she know?* Eddie was going to say, but he thought of the Queen's wise and cunning eyes, and of Ben throwing that bit of white paper into the water by the beach in Red Hook, and decided not to ask.

"The Shadowhunter boats are starting to move," said Stan, looking out at the river. "I guess they've picked up everyone they could."

"Right." Jim squared his shoulders. "Time to get going." He moved slowly toward the truck cab—he was limping, though he seemed otherwise mostly uninjured.

Jim swung himself into the driver's seat, and in a moment the truck's engine was roiling again. They took off, skimming the water, the drops splashed up by the wheels catching the gray-silver of the lightening sky.

"This is so weird," said Stan. "I keep expecting the truck to start sinking."

"I can't believe you just went through what we went through and you think *this* is weird," said Richie, but there was no malice in his tone and no annoyance. He sounded only very, very tired.

"What will happen to the Denbroughs?" Eddie asked. "After everything that's happened—the Clave—"

Richie shrugged. "The Clave works in mysterious ways. I don't know

what they'll do. They'll be very interested in *you*, though. And in what you can do."

Stan made a noise. Eddie thought at first that it was a noise of protest, but when he looked closely at Stan, Eddie saw he was greener than ever. "What's wrong, Stan?"

"It's the river," he said. "Running water isn't good for vampires. It's pure, and—we're not."

"The East River's hardly pure," said Eddie, but he reached out and touched his arm gently anyway. Stan smiled at him. "Didn't you fall into the water when the ship came apart?"

"No. There was a piece of metal floating in the water and Richie tossed me onto it. I stayed out of the river."

Eddie looked over his shoulder at Richie. He could see him a little more clearly now; the darkness was fading. "Thank you," he said. "Do you think..."

Richie raised his eyebrows. "Do I think what?"

"That Pennywise might have drowned?"

"Never believe the bad guy is dead until you see a body," said Stan. "That just leads to unhappiness and surprise ambushes."

"You're not wrong," said Richie. "My guess is he isn't dead. Otherwise we would have found the Mortal Instruments."

"Can the Clave go on without them? Whether Pennywise's alive or not?" Eddie wondered.

"The Clave always goes on," said Richie. "That's all it knows how to do." He turned his face toward the eastern horizon. "The sun's coming up."

Stan went rigid. Eddie stared at him in surprise for a moment, and then in shocked horror. He whirled to follow Richie's gaze. He was right—the eastern horizon was a blood-red stain spreading out from a golden disc. Eddie could see the first edge of the sun staining the

water around them unearthly hues of green and scarlet and gold.

“No!” Eddie whispered.

Richie looked at him in surprise, and then at Stan, who sat motionless, staring at the rising sun like a trapped mouse staring at a cat. Richie got quickly to his feet and walked over to the truck cab. He spoke in a low voice. Eddie saw Jim turn to look at him and Stan, and then back at Richie. He shook his head.

The truck lurched forward. Jim must have pressed his foot to the gas. Eddie grabbed for the side of the truck bed to steady himself. Up front, Richie was shouting at Jim that there had to be some way to make the damn thing go faster, but Eddie knew they’d never outrun the dawn.

“There must be something,” he said to Stan. He couldn’t believe that in less than five minutes he’d gone from incredulous relief to incredulous horror. “We could cover you, maybe, with our clothes—”

Stan was still staring at the sun, white-faced. “A pile of rags won’t work,” he said. “Adrian explained—it takes walls to protect us from sunlight. It’ll burn through cloth.”

“But there must be something—”

“Eddie.” He could see Stan clearly now, in the gray predawn light, his eyes huge and dark in his white face. He held out his hands. “Come here.”

Eddie fell against him, trying to cover as much of his body as he could with his own. He knew it was useless. When the sun touched Stan, he’d fall away to ashes.

They sat for a moment in perfect stillness, arms wrapped around each other. Eddie could feel the rise and fall of his chest—habit, he reminded himself, not necessity. Stan might not breathe, but he could still die.

“I won’t let you die,” Eddie said.

“I don’t think you get a choice.” She felt him smile. “I didn’t think I’d

get to see the sun again,” he said. “I guess I was wrong.”

“Stan—”

Richie shouted something. Eddie looked up. The sky was flooded with rose-colored light, like dye poured into clear water. Stan tensed under him. “I love you, Eddie,” he said. “I hope you know that.”

Gold threads shot through the rosy sky like the gold veining in expensive marble. The water around them blazed with light and Stan went rigid, his head falling back, his open eyes filling with gold as if molten liquid were rising inside of him. Black lines appeared on his skin like cracks in a shattered statue.

“Stan!” Eddie screamed. He reached for him but felt himself hauled suddenly backward; it was Richie, his hands gripping Eddie’s shoulders. Eddie tried to pull away but he held him tightly; Richie was saying something in his ear, over and over, and only after a few moments did he even begin to understand him.

“Eddie, look. *Look.*”

“No!” Eddie’s hands flew to his face. He could taste the brackish water from the bottom of the truck bed on his palms. It was salty, like tears. “I don’t want to look. I don’t want to—”

“Eddie.” Richie’s hands were at Eddie’s wrists, pulling his hands away from his face. The dawn light stung his eyes. “*Look.*”

Eddie looked. And heard his own breath whistle harshly in his lungs as he gasped. Stan was sitting up at the back of the truck, in a patch of sunlight, openmouthed and staring down at himself. The sun danced on the water behind him and the edges of his hair glinted like gold. He had not burned away to ash, but sat unscorched in the sunlight, and the pale skin of his face and arms and hands was entirely unmarked.

Outside the Institute, night was falling. The faint red of sunset glowed in through the windows of Ben’s bedroom as he stared at the pile of his belongings on the bed. The pile was much smaller than he

thought it would be. Seven whole years of life in this place, and this was all he had to show for it: half a duffel bag's worth of clothes, a small stack of books, and a few weapons.

He had debated whether he should bring the few things he'd saved from the manor house in Derry with him when he left tonight. Eleven had given him back his father's silver ring, which he no longer felt comfortable wearing.

He had hung it on a loop of chain around his throat. In the end, he had decided to take everything: There was no point leaving anything of himself behind in this place. He was packing the duffel with clothes when a knock sounded at the door. He went to it, expecting Bill or Richie.

It was Sharon. She wore a severe black dress and her hair was pulled back sharply from her face. She looked older than he remembered her. Two deep lines ran from the corners of her mouth to her jaw. Only her eyes had any color. "Ben," she said. "Can I come in?"

"You can do what you like," he said, returning to the bed. "It's your house." He grabbed up a handful of shirts and stuffed them into the duffel bag with possibly unnecessary force.

"Actually, it's the Clave's house," said Sharon. "We're only its guardians."

Ben shoved books into the bag. "Whatever."

"What are you doing?" If Ben hadn't known better, he would have thought her voice wavered slightly.

"I'm packing," he said. "It's what people generally do when they're moving out."

She blanched. "Don't leave," she said. "If you want to stay—"

"I don't want to stay. I don't belong here."

"Where will you go?"

"Jim's," he said, and saw her flinch. "For a while. After that, I don't

know. Maybe to Derry.”

“Is that where you think you belong?” There was an aching sadness in her voice.

Ben stopped packing for a moment and stared down at his bag. “I don’t know where I belong.”

“With your family.” Sharon took a tentative step forward. “With us.”

“*You* threw me out.” Ben heard the harshness in his own voice, and tried to soften it. “I’m sorry,” he said, turning to look at her. “About everything that’s happened. But you didn’t want me before, and I can’t imagine you want me now. Zack’s going to be sick awhile; you’ll be needing to take care of him. I’ll just be in the way.”

“In the way?” She sounded incredulous. “Zack wants to *see* you, Ben —”

“I doubt that.”

“What about Bill? Richie, Georgie—they need you. If you don’t believe me that I want you here—and I couldn’t blame you if you didn’t—you must know that they do. We’ve been through a bad time, Ben. Don’t hurt them more than they’re already hurt.”

“That’s not fair.”

“I don’t blame you if you hate me.” Her voice was wavering. Ben swung around to stare at her in surprise. “But what I did—even throwing you out—treating you as I did, it was to protect you. And because I was afraid.”

“Afraid of me?”

She nodded.

“Well, that makes me feel *much* better.”

Sharon took a deep breath. “I thought you would break my heart like Pennwise did,” she said. “You were the first thing I loved, you see, after him, that wasn’t my own blood. And you were just a child—”

“You thought I was someone else.”

“No. I’ve always known just who you are. Ever since the first time I saw you getting off the ship from Derry, when you were ten years old—you walked into my heart, just as Richie did when we adopted him, just as Bill did when he was born.” She shook her head. “You can’t understand. You’ve never been a parent. You never love anything like you love your children. And nothing can make you angrier.”

“I did notice the angry part,” Ben said, after a pause.

“I don’t expect you to forgive me,” Sharon said. “But if you’d stay for Richie and Bill and Georgie, I’d be so grateful—”

It was the wrong thing to say. “I don’t want your gratitude,” Ben said, and turned back to the duffel bag. There was nothing left to put in it. He tugged at the zipper.

“*A la claire fontaine*,” Sharon said, “*m’en allant promener*.”

He turned to look at her. “What?”

“*Il y a longtemps que je t’aime. Jamais je ne t’oublierai*—it’s the old French ballad I used to sing to Bill. The one you asked me about.”

There was very little light in the room now, and in the dimness Sharon looked to him almost as she had when he was ten years old, as if she had not changed at all in the past seven years. She looked severe and worried, anxious—and hopeful. She looked like the only mother he’d ever known.

“You were wrong that I never sang it to you,” she said. “It’s just that you never heard me.”

Ben said nothing, but he reached out and yanked the zipper open on the duffel bag, letting his belongings spill out onto the bed.

Notes for the Chapter:

Next is the epilogue and then it's done :"(

27. Epilogue: Things We Left Behind

"Eddie!" Stan's mother beamed all over her face at the sight of the boy standing on her doorstep. "I haven't seen you for ages. I was starting to worry you and Stan had had a fight."

"Oh, no," Eddie said. "I just wasn't feeling well, that's all." *Even when you've got magic healing runes, apparently you're not invulnerable.* He hadn't been surprised to wake up the morning after the battle to find he had a pounding headache and a fever; he'd thought he had a cold—who wouldn't, after freezing in wet clothes on the open water for hours at night?—but Eleven said he had most likely exhausted himself creating the rune that had destroyed Pennywise's ship.

Stan's mother clucked sympathetically. "The same bug Stan had the week before last, I bet. He could barely get out of bed."

"He's better now, though, right?" Eddie said. He knew it was true, but he didn't mind hearing it again.

"He's fine. He's out in the back garden, I think. Just go on through the gate." She smiled. "He'll be happy to see you."

The redbrick row houses on Stan's street were divided by pretty white wrought iron fences, each of which had a gate that led to a tiny patch of garden in the back of the house. The sky was bright blue and the air cool, despite the sunny skies. Eddie could taste the tang of future snow on the air.

Eddie fastened the gate shut behind him and went looking for Stan. He was in the back garden, as promised, lying on a plastic lounging chair with a comic open in his lap. Stan pushed it aside when he saw Eddie, sat up, and grinned. "Hey, Eds."

"Eds?" Eddie perched beside him on the chair. "You're kidding me, right?"

"I was trying it out. No?"

"No," Eddie said firmly, and ruffled his dark hair.

"I'm glad you came over," Stan said.

"Me too. I would have come sooner, but—"

"You were sick. I know." He'd spent the week texting him from Jim's couch, where he'd lain wrapped up in a blanket watching *CSI* reruns. It was comforting to spend time in a world where every puzzle had a detectable, scientific answer.

"I'm better now." Eddie glanced around and shivered, pulling his red jacket closer around his body. "What are you doing lying around outside in this weather, anyway? Aren't you freezing?"

Stan shook his head. "I don't really feel cold or heat anymore. Besides"—his mouth curled into a smile—"I want to spend as much time in the sunlight as I can. I still get sleepy during the day, but I'm fighting it."

Eddie touched the back of his hand to his cheek. His face was warm from the sun, but underneath, the skin was cool. "But everything else is still ... still the same?"

"You mean am I still a vampire? Yeah. It looks like it. Still want to drink blood, still no heartbeat. I'll have to avoid the doctor, but since vampires don't get sick..." He shrugged.

"And you talked to Adrian? He still has no idea why you can go out into the sun?"

"None. He seems pretty pissed about it too." Stan blinked at Eddie sleepily, as if it were two in the morning instead of the afternoon. "I think it upsets his ideas about the way things should be. Plus he's going to have a harder job getting me to roam the night when I'm determined to roam the day instead."

"You'd think he'd be thrilled."

"Vampires don't like change. They're very traditional." Stan smiled at him, and Eddie thought, *He'll always look like this. When I'm fifty or sixty, he'll still look sixteen.* It wasn't a happy thought. "Anyway, this'll be good for my music career. If that Anne Rice stuff is anything to go by, vampires make great rock stars."

"I'm not sure that information is reliable."

He leaned back against the chair. "What is? Besides you, of course."

"*Reliable*? Is that how you think of me?" Eddie demanded in mock indignation.

A shadow passed across his face. "Eddie..."

"What? What is it?" Eddie reached for his hand and held it. "You're using your bad news voice."

He looked away from him. "I don't know if it's bad news or not."

"Everything's one or the other," Eddie said. "Just tell me you're all right."

"I'm alright," Stan said.

"Is this about Richie?" Eddie asked. "Is it because of the demons? Because I got you turned into a vampire?" His voice was rising higher and higher. "I know everything's been crazy, but I can keep you away from all that. I can—"

Stan winced. "You're starting to sound like a dolphin, do you know that? Stop."

Eddie stopped.

"Do you remember our fight?"

"*Which* fight?" Eddie said in a mocking tone.

"At the Institute, when I saw you kissing Richie and walked out."

Eddie bit his lip, truth was, he still remembered that day as if it were yesterday. "Yeah?"

"Did I ever apologized for that?"

Eddie frowned, not sure of where this conversation was going. "No, but—"

"I'm sorry."

Eddie shook his head. "You don't have to be. I understand."

"Actually," Stan gave a loud sigh. "There's something you don't know."

"What is it?"

He started to blush. Eddie hadn't known vampires *could* blush. It looked startling against his pale skin. "I wasn't just angry at Richie because he was an asshole," Stan looked away. "I was jealous."

Eddie sighed. "I get it, I mean, we were best friends. It's normal for you to be angry."

"No. I was jealous of *him*." Stan said firmly. "Because I was in love with you. Sometimes I think I still am."

Eddie stared at him, trying to frame a response, any response. "What?"

"It's okay," Stan waved his hand down. "I knew you didn't feel the same way."

Eddie was silent for a long moment, searching for words. Finally, he said: "I *do* love you, Stan."

"But not the same way."

"I just..." Eddie looked down. "*I'm sorry*."

"Don't be." Stan shrugged. "My feelings for you have caused an infinite number of problems."

"That's not true." Eddie said.

Stan looked down at their hands, where they lay intertwined on the plastic of the lounge chair. Eddie's fingers looked small against his, but for the first time, Eddie's skin was a shade darker. Stan stroked his thumb absently over Eddie's knuckles and said, "I know you like Richie. And I know he likes *you*."

"Stan..." His teeth had started to chatter, only partly from the cold.

"No, wait." Stan interrupted. "I always knew you had feelings for each other, and I tried so hard to push you away, and now I know that was stupid. It was the stupidest thing I've ever done in my entire life."

"It wasn't just you." Eddie whispered.

"And I know Richie has saved me countless times." Stan shrugged again. "And he may be an asshole, but...he cares about you, and that matters a lot."

"Maybe I could love *you* someday."

"If you ever do," he said, "come and let me know. You know where to find me."

Eddie's teeth were chattering harder. "I can't lose you, Stan. I *can't*."

"You never will. I'm not leaving you. But I'd rather have what we have, which is real and true and important, than have you pretend anything else. When I'm with you, I want to know I'm with the real you, the real Eddie."

Eddie leaned his head against Stan's, closing his eyes. He still felt like Stan, despite everything; still smelled like him, like his laundry soap. "Maybe I don't know who that is."

"But I do."

Eddie left Stan's house twenty minutes later, fastening the gate shut behind him. *How could I be so stupid?*, Eddie asked himself.

The breeze around him made him shiver, he was afraid he was going to catch a cold, so he fastened his pace. And as he was turning to the other block, he saw the familiar red hair and the ripped jeans and the old sneakers.

"Eddie," Beverly looked surprised. "Hey."

Eddie went and hugged her tightly, arms around her back. "God, this is a mess."

She giggled, but it was a weird one, more calm. "And *now* you notice?"

"I guess I always did," Eddie shrugged. "Are you going to visit Stan?"

Beverly tensed. Eddie could feel it. "Yup. I haven't seen him since you guys brought him from the boat."

"He's been asking for you," That wasn't wasn't entirely true, they both never mentioned her, but they were too busy in their own conversation.

Beverly nodded slowly. "Okay, then..." She gestured behind Eddie.

Eddie nodded, her behaviour was weird. "Uh, are you okay, Bev?"

Beverly looked down. "Wow. It's the first time you've ever asked me that since three weeks ago." Her voice sounded sad, disappointed. "I don't know."

"It seems like you're about to give bad news,"

"Not entirely bad news," She said. "I was going to tell Stan first, but now that you're here—"

"Tell me what?"

She sighed. "I'm moving out." She said.

The words sank into Eddie like a bucket of cold water. But "*What?*" was the only thing that came to his mind.

Beverly shrugged. "Not permanently, I just need some time away, you know? To clear my head."

"But...*why?*" Eddie was honestly so confused he thought he was imagining it.

"My cousin is in town, and she offered me to visit her in her new

apartment, so I thought why not?" She shrugged again.

Eddie hugged himself. "So you're just going to *leave*?"

Beverly exhaled. "Eddie, I need some time for myself, to think. I mean...I always feel like I'm the third wheel to *everything* you guys do."

"The third wheel?" Eddie shook his head. "What are you talking about? You know it's not true."

"Isn't it?" Beverly said. "Because sometimes I feel like...I'm alone." Her voice cracked. "Eddie, I always thought it was going to be the three of us 'against the world'."

"We are."

"I don't think we are anymore," She made her hands into fists. "I mean...I'm a warlock. I'm immortal. Someday I'll stop aging, and you won't."

"Bev..."

"I made a decision, please, respect that." She brought a hand to wipe away the little tears from the corners of her eyes.

Eddie felt colder now. "Are you sure?"

She nodded. "Yeah."

"When are you leaving?"

"In a few hours, my cousin is picking me up, I promise I won't tell her anything."

That was it, Eddie was hugging her again. "I'm going to miss you."

"Me too." She hugged him back. "So much." She gulped hard.

"I'll need you."

"I doubt that, but if you ever do, call me and I'll be right back."

"I will *always* need you, Bev." Eddie let go of the hug. "Things are going to get boring without you here."

She laughed. "I can't argue against that logic."

"You dropped me off. You didn't have to pick me up too," Eddie said, swinging himself up into the cab beside Jim. Trust Jim to replace his old, destroyed truck with a new one that was exactly like it.

"Forgive me my paternal panic," said Jim, handing him a waxed paper cup of coffee. Eddie took a sip—no milk and lots of sugar, the way he liked it. "I tend to get a little nervous when you're not in my immediate line of sight these days."

"Oh, yeah?" Eddie held the coffee tightly to keep it from spilling as they bumped down the potholed road. "How long do you think that's going to go on for?"

Jim looked considering. "Not long. Five, maybe six years."

"Jim!"

"I plan to let you start dating when you're thirty, if that helps."

"Actually, that doesn't sound so bad. I may not be ready until I'm thirty."

"I see." He probably did. "Did you want me to drop you at home?"

"You're going to the hospital, right?" Eddie could tell from the nervous tension underlying his jokes. "I'll go with you."

They were on the bridge now, and Eddie looked out over the river, nursing his coffee thoughtfully. He never got tired of this view, the narrow river of water between the canyon walls of Manhattan and Brooklyn. It glittered in the sun like aluminum foil. He wondered why he'd never tried to draw it. He remembered asking his mother once why she'd never used him as a model, never drawn her own son. "To draw something is to try to capture it forever," Sonia had said, sitting on the floor with a paintbrush dripping cadmium blue

onto her jeans. "If you really love something, you never try to keep it the way it is forever. You have to let it be free to change."

But I hate change . Eddie took a deep breath. "Jim," he said. "Pennywise said something to me when I was on the ship, something about—"

"Nothing good ever starts with the words 'Pennywise said,'" muttered Jim.

"Maybe not. But it was about you and my mom. He said you were in love with her."

Silence. They were stopped in traffic on the bridge. Eddie could hear the sound of the Q train rumbling past. "Do *you* think that's true?" Jim said at last.

"Well." Eddie could sense the tension in the air and tried to choose his words carefully. "I don't know. I mean, he said it before and I just dismissed it as paranoia and hatred. But this time I started thinking, and well—it is sort of weird that you've always been around, you've been like a dad to me, we practically lived on the farm in the summer, and yet neither you nor my mom ever dated anyone else. So I thought maybe..."

"You thought maybe what?"

"That maybe you've been together all this time and you just didn't want to tell me. Maybe you thought I was too young to get it. Maybe you were afraid it would start me asking questions about my dad. But I'm not too young to get it anymore. You can tell me. I guess that's what I'm saying. You can tell me anything."

"Maybe not anything." There was another silence as the truck inched forward in the crawling traffic. Jim squinted into the sun, his fingers tapping on the wheel. Finally, he said, "You're right. I am in love with your mother."

"That's great," Eddie said, trying to sound supportive despite how gross the idea happened to be of people his mom's and Jim's age being in love.

“But,” Jim said, finishing, “she doesn’t know it.”

“She doesn’t know it?” Eddie made a wide sweeping gesture with his arm. Fortunately, his coffee cup was empty. “How could she not know? Haven’t you told her?”

“As a matter of fact,” said Jim, slamming his foot down on the gas so that the truck lurched forward, “no.”

“Why not?” Jim sighed and rubbed his stubbled chin tiredly. “Because,” he said. “It never seemed like the right time.”

“That is a lame excuse, and you know it.”

Jim managed to make a noise halfway between a chuckle and a grunt of annoyance. “Maybe, but it’s the truth. When I first realized how I felt about Sonia, I was the same age you are. Sixteen. And we’d all just met Pennywise. I wasn’t any competition for him. I was even a little glad that if it wasn’t going to be me she wanted, it was going to be someone who really deserved her.” His voice hardened. “When I realized how wrong I was about that, it was too late. When we ran away together from Derry, and she was pregnant with you, I offered to marry her, to take care of her. I said it didn’t matter who the father of her baby was, I’d raise it like my own. She thought I was being charitable. I couldn’t convince her I was being as selfish as I knew how to be. She told me she didn’t want to be a burden on me, that it was too much to ask of anyone. After she left me in Paris, I went back to Derry but I was always restless, never happy. There was always that part of me missing, the part that was Sonia. I would dream that she was somewhere needing my help, that she was calling out to me and I couldn’t hear her. Finally I went looking for her.”

“I remember she was happy,” Eddie said in a small voice. “When you found her.”

“She was and she wasn’t. She was glad to see me, but at the same time I symbolized for her that whole world she’d run from, and she wanted no part of it. She agreed to let me stay when I promised I’d give up all ties to the pack, to the Clave, to Derry, to all of it. I would have offered to move in with both of you, but Sonia thought my transformations would be too hard to hide from you, and I had to

agree. I bought the bookstore, took a new life. Pretending the old Jim Hopper was dead. And for all intents and purposes, he has been."

"You really did a lot for my mom. You gave up a whole life."

"I would have done more," Jim said matter-of-factly. "But she was so adamant about wanting nothing to do with the Clave or Downworld, and whatever I might pretend, I'm still a lycanthrope. I'm a living reminder of all of that. And she was so sure she wanted you never to know any of it. You know, I never agreed with the trips to Eleven, to altering your memories or your Sight, but it was what she wanted and I let her do it because if I'd tried to stop her, she would have sent me away. And there's no way—no way—she would have let me marry her, be your father and not tell you the truth about myself. And that would have brought down everything, all those fragile walls she'd tried so hard to build between herself and the Invisible World. I couldn't do that to her. So I stayed silent."

"You mean you never told her how you felt?"

"Your mother isn't stupid, Eddie," said Jim. He sounded calm, but there was a certain tightness in his voice. "She must have known. I offered to *marry* her. However kind her denials might have been, I do know one thing: She knows how I feel and she doesn't feel the same way."

Eddie was silent.

"It's all right," Jim said, trying for lightness. "I accepted it a long time ago."

Eddie's nerves were singing with a sudden tension that he didn't think was from the caffeine. He pushed back thoughts about his own life. "You offered to marry her, but did you say it was because you loved her? It doesn't sound like it."

Jim was silent. "I think you should have told her the truth. I think you're wrong about how she feels."

"I'm not, Eddie." Jim's voice was firm: *That's enough now.*

"I remember once I asked her why she didn't date," Eddie said,

ignoring Jim's admonishing tone. "She said it was because she'd already given her heart. I thought she meant to my dad, but now—now I'm not so sure."

Jim looked actually astonished. "She *said* that?" He caught himself, and added, "Probably she did mean Pennywise, you know."

"I don't think so." Eddie shot him a look out of the corner of his eye. "Besides, don't you hate it? Not ever saying how you really feel?"

This time the silence lasted until they were off the bridge and rumbling down Orchard Street, lined with shops and restaurants whose signs were in beautiful Chinese characters of curling gold and red. "Yes, I hated it," Jim said. "At the time, I thought what I had with you and your mother was better than nothing. But if you can't tell the truth to the people you care about the most, eventually you stop being able to tell the truth to yourself."

There was a sound like rushing water in Edsie's ears. Looking down, he saw that he'd crushed the empty waxed-paper cup he was holding into an unrecognizable ball.

"Take me to the Institute," he said. "Please."

Jim looked over at him in surprise. "I thought you wanted to come to the hospital?"

"I'll meet you there when I'm finished," Eddie said. "There's something I have to do first."

The lower level of the Institute was full of sunlight and pale dust motes. Eddie ran down the narrow aisle between the pews, threw herself at the elevator, and stabbed at the button. "Come on, come on," he muttered. "Come—"

The golden doors creaked open. Richie was standing inside the elevator. His eyes widened when he saw him.

"—on," Eddie finished, and dropped his arm. "Oh. Hi."

Richie stared at him. "Eddie?"

"You cut your hair," he said without thinking. It was true—the long metallic strands were no longer falling in his face, but were neatly and evenly cut. It made him look more civilized, even a little older. He was dressed neatly too, in a dark blue sweater and jeans. Something silver glinted at his throat, just under the collar of the sweater.

Richie raised a hand. "Oh. Right. Sharon cut it." The door of the elevator began to slide closed; he held it back. "Did you need to come up to the Institute?"

Eddie shook his head. "I just wanted to talk to you."

"Oh." He looked a little surprised at that, but stepped out of the elevator, letting the door clang shut behind him. "I was just running over to Taki's to pick up some food. No one really feels like cooking..."

"I understand," Eddie said, then wished he hadn't. It wasn't as if the Denbroughs' desire to cook or not cook had anything to do with him.

"We can talk there," Richie said. He started toward the door, then paused and looked back at Eddie. Standing between two of the burning candelabras, their light casting a pale gold overlay onto his hair and skin, he looked like a painting of an angel. Eddie's heart constricted. "Are you coming, or not?" Richie snapped, not sounding angelic in the least.

"Oh. Right. I'm coming." Eddie hurried to catch up with him.

As they walked to Taki's, Eddie tried to keep the conversation away from topics related to himself, Richie, or himself and Richie. Instead, he asked him how Ben, Georgie, and Bill were doing.

Richie hesitated. They were crossing First and a cool breeze was blowing up the avenue. The sky was a cloudless blue, a perfect New York autumn day.

"I'm sorry." Eddie winced at his own stupidity. "They must be pretty miserable. All these people they knew are dead."

“It’s different for Shadowhunters,” Richie said. “We’re warriors. We expect death in a way you—”

Eddie couldn’t help a sigh. “‘You *mundanes* don’t.’ That’s what you were going to say, isn’t it?”

“I was,” he admitted. “Sometimes it’s hard even for me to know what you really are.”

They had stopped in front of Taki’s, with its sagging roof. The ifrit who guarded the front door gazed down at them with suspicious red eyes.

“I’m Eddie,” he said.

Richie looked down at him. “I know.”

Inside, they found a corner booth and slid into it. The diner was nearly empty: Betty, the pixie waitress, lounged against the counter, lazily fluttering her blue-white wings. She and Richie had dated once. A pair of werewolves occupied another booth. They were eating raw shanks of lamb and arguing about who would win in a fight: Dumbledore from the Harry Potter books or Jane Ives.

“Dumbledore would totally win,” said the first one. “He has the badass Killing Curse.”

The second lycanthrope made a trenchant point. “But Dumbledore isn’t real.”

“I don’t think Jane Ives is real either,” scoffed the first. “Have you ever *met* her?”

“This is so weird,” said Eddie, slinking down in his seat. “Are you listening to them?”

“No. It’s rude to eavesdrop.” Richie was studying the menu, which gave Eddie the opportunity to covertly study *him*. *I never look at you*, Eddie had told him. It was true too, or at least Eddie never looked at him the way he wanted to, with an artist’s eye. He would always get lost, distracted by a detail: the curve of his cheekbone, the angle of his eyelashes, the shape of his mouth.

"You're staring at me," Richie said, without looking up from the menu. "Why are you staring at me? Is something wrong?"

Betty's arrival at their table saved Eddie from having to answer. Her pen, Eddie noticed, was a silvery birch twig. She regarded Eddie curiously out of all-blue eyes. "Do you know what you want?"

Unprepared, Eddie ordered a few random items off the menu. Richie asked for a plate of sweet potato fries and a number of dishes to be boxed up and brought home to the Denbroughs. Betty departed, leaving behind the faint smell of flowers.

"Tell Bill and Ben I'm sorry about everything that happened," Eddie said when Betty was out of earshot. "And tell Georgie that I'll take him to Forbidden Planet anytime."

"Only mundanes say they're sorry when what they mean is 'I share your grief,'" Richie observed. "None of it was your fault, Eddie." His eyes were suddenly bright with hate. "It was Pennywise's."

"I take it there's been no..."

"No sign of him? No. I'd guess he's holed up somewhere until he can finish what he started with the Sword. After that..." Richie shrugged.

"After that, what?"

"I don't know. He's a lunatic. It's hard to guess what a lunatic will do next." But he avoided Eddie's eyes, and he knew what Richie was thinking: *War*. That was what Pennywise wanted. War with the Shadowhunters. And he would get it too. It was only a matter of where he would strike first. "Anyway, I doubt that's what you came to talk to me about, is it?"

"No." Now that the moment had come, Eddie was having a hard time finding words. He caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the silvery side of the napkin holder. White T-shirt, white face, hectic flush in his cheeks. He looked like he had a fever. He felt a little like it too. "I've been wanting to talk to you for the past few days—"

"You could have fooled me." His voice was unnaturally sharp. "Every time I called you, Jim said you were sick. I figured you were avoiding

me. Again.”

“I wasn’t.” It seemed to Eddie that there were vast amounts of empty space between them, though the booth wasn’t that big and they weren’t sitting that far apart. “I did want to talk to you. I’ve been thinking about you all the time.”

Richie made a noise of surprise and held his hand out across the table. Eddie took it, a wave of relief breaking over him. “I’ve been thinking about you, too.”

Richie’s grip was warm on his, comforting, and Eddie remembered how he’d taken Richie’s hand back when they were arriving at the City of Bones with Brother Murray. How Richie told him about his parents. “I really was sick,” Eddie said. “I swear. I almost died back there on the ship, you know.”

Richie let his hand go, but he was staring at Eddie, almost as if he meant to memorize his face. “I know,” he said. “Every time you almost die, I almost die myself.”

His words made Eddie’s heart rattle in his chest as if he’d swallowed a mouthful of caffeine. “Richie. I came to tell you that—”

“Wait. Let me talk first.” He held his hands up as if to ward off Eddie’s next words. “Before you say anything, I wanted to apologize to you.”

“Apologize? For what?”

“For not listening to you.” He raked his hair back with both hands and Eddie noticed a little scar, a tiny silver line, on the side of his throat. It hadn’t been there before. “You kept telling me that I couldn’t have what I wanted from you, and I kept pushing at you and pushing at you and not listening to you at all. I just wanted you and I didn’t care what anybody else had to say about it. Not even you.”

Eddie’s mouth went suddenly dry, but before he could say anything, Betty was back, with Richie’s fries and a number of plates for Eddie. Eddie stared down at what he’d ordered. A green milk shake, what looked like raw hamburger steak, and a plate of chocolate-dipped

crickets. Not that it mattered; his stomach was knotted up too much to even consider eating. "Richie," he said, as soon as the waitress was gone. "You didn't do anything wrong. You—"

"No. Let me finish." He was staring down at his fries as if they held the secrets of the universe. "Eddie, I have to say it now or—or I won't say it." His words tumbled out in a rush: "I thought I'd lost my family. And I don't mean the Toziers or the Wheelers. I mean the Denbroughs. I thought there was nothing left in my world but you. I—I was crazy with loss and I took it out on you and I'm sorry. You were right."

"No. I was stupid. I was cruel to you—"

"You had every right to be." He raised his eyes to look at Eddie and he was suddenly and strangely reminded of being four years old at the beach, crying when the wind came up and blew away the castle he had made. His mother had told him he could make another one if he liked, but it hadn't stopped his crying because what he had thought was permanent was not permanent after all, but only made out of sand that vanished at the touch of wind or water. "What you said was true. We don't live or love in a vacuum. There are people around us who care about us who would be hurt if we let ourselves feel what we might want to feel. And I don't want to be that selfish."

Eddie felt Richie's words like a door slamming in his face.

"We're just going to be friends from now on," he said, looking at Eddie with a hopeful expectation that he would be pleased, which made Eddie want to scream that he was smashing his heart into pieces and he had to stop. "That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

It took Eddie a long time to answer, and when he did, his own voice sounded like an echo, coming from very far away. "Yes," he said, and he heard the rush of waves in his ears, and his eyes stung as if from sand or salt spray. "That's what I wanted."

Eddie walked numbly up the wide steps that led up to Beth Israel's big glass front doors. In a way, he was glad he was here rather than

anywhere else. What he wanted more than anything was to throw himself into his mother's arms and cry, even if he could never explain to his mother what he was crying about. Since he couldn't do that, sitting next to his mother's bed and crying seemed like the next best option.

He'd held it together pretty well at Taki's, even hugging Richie goodbye when she left. He hadn't started bawling till he'd gotten on the subway, and then he'd found himself crying about everything he hadn't cried about yet, Richie and Stan and Beverly and his mother and even Pennywise. He'd cried loudly enough that the man sitting across from him had offered him a tissue, and he'd screamed, *What do you think you're looking at, jerk?* at him, because that was what you did in New York. After that he felt a little better.

As he neared the top of the stairs, he realized there was a woman standing there. She was wearing a long dark cloak over a dress, not the sort of thing you usually saw on a Manhattan street. The cloak was made of a dark velvety material and had a wide hood, which was up, hiding her face. Glancing around, Eddie saw that no one else on the hospital steps or standing by its doors seemed to notice the apparition. A glamour, then.

He reached the top step and paused, looking up at the woman. He still couldn't see her face. He said, "Look, if you're here to see me, just tell me what you want. I'm not really in the mood for all this glamour and secrecy stuff right now."

He noticed people around him stopping to stare at the crazy boy who was talking to no one. He fought the urge to stick out his tongue at them.

"All right." The voice was gentle, oddly familiar. The woman reached up and pushed back her hood. Silver hair spilled out over her shoulders in a flood. It was the woman Eddie had seen staring at him in the courtyard of the Marble Cemetery, the same woman who'd saved them from Malik's knife at the Institute. Up close, Eddie could see that she had the sort of face that was all angles, too sharp to be pretty, though her eyes were an intense and lovely hazel. "My name is Rena. Rena Davenport."

“And...?” Eddie said. “What do you want from me?”

The woman—Rena—hesitated. “I knew your mother, Sonia,” she said. “We were friends in Derry.”

“You can’t see her,” Eddie said. “No visitors but family until she gets better.”

“But she won’t get better.”

Eddie felt as if he’d been slapped in the face. “*What?*”

“I’m sorry,” Rena said. “I didn’t mean to upset you. It’s just that I know what’s wrong with Sonia, and there’s nothing a mundane hospital can do for her now. What happened to her—she did it to herself, Edward.”

“No. You don’t understand. Pennywise—”

“She did it before Pennywise got to her. So he couldn’t get any information out of her. She planned it that way. It was a secret, a secret she shared with only one other person, and she told only one other person how the spell could be reversed. That person was me.”

“You mean—”

“Yes,” Rena said. “I mean I can show you how to wake your mother up.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Bitch its over!!!!!! :(Not gonna lie, I feel nostalgic, it was almost two months ago when I finished the first book. Thank you so much for being here again. Even though I couldn't update as fast as before bc life is busy. Let me know what you liked about this one or if you liked the first one better. Obviously there's going to be a third book don't worry.